BLACK LABEL

88

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MATURE

SWAMP THING™

SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS

Rick Veitch
Michael Zulli
Vince Locke
Trish Mulvihill

VEITCH
MULVIHILL

WITH JOHNNY DC

Hi, gang, your ol' pal Johnny is back! Pull up a comfy chair and lend Johnny an ear, because we've got a *swampy* story to tell . . . and what better time than *right now*, with SWAMP THING #88 lumbering toward stands like a moss-covered freight train with philosophy on its mind?

If you're a longtime reader, you know SWAMP THING isn't just another comic. But if you're new to the bayou, well, consider this your guided tour through the vines, muck, and metaphysics. . . Either way, Johnny's here to give you the full scoop, DC-style, as only a friendly corporate cartoon spokesman can . . .

Our tale begins in 1971, when **Len Wein** and **Bernie Wrightson** collaborated on an eight-page story for THE HOUSE OF SECRETS #92. Titled "Swamp Thing," it mixed mad science with Southern horror to unveil a tragic figure born of betrayal and an experiment gone awry . . .

That gothic shocker struck such a nerve that a new Swamp Thing soon clawed his way into his own series, with tragic muck-man Alec Holland becoming a fixture of DC's darker realms—and movie theaters. Holland wrestled with monsters and men alike, and he brooded with the best of 'em . . .

SWAMP THING offered atmosphere, mood, and breathtaking brushwork . . . When Wein pursued other projects, **David Michelinie**, **Gerry Conway**, **David Anthony Kraft**, and **Marty Pasko** scripted further thought-provoking tales, illustrated by **Nestor Redondo**, **Tom Yeates**, **John Totleben**, **Stephen R. Bissette**, **Rick Veitch**, **Alfredo Alcala**, and others . . .

Fast-forward to 1984, when rising British scribe **Alan Moore** asked a dangerous, intriguing question: "What if we've been wrong about him all along?" With THE SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING #21, Moore redefined the character not as a man turned into a plant, but as a *plant that thought it was a man*!

The result was one of the most daring reinventions in comics history . . . SWAMP THING became a philosophical exploration of identity, humanity, and horror, framing a timeless romance that crossed the boundaries of flesh and flora . . . Moore changed the way comics could tell stories, and when he stepped away, he left huge shoes to fill . . .

Luckily, Moore had handpicked his successor, writer-artist **Rick Veitch**, who didn't just succeed him, but *responded* to him . . . Veitch honored his predecessor's groundbreaking work while pushing Swamp Thing toward someplace new—and *boy*, did he push . . .

Mirroring Moore's space odyssey, Veitch created a *time* odyssey instigated by the INVASION! miniseries . . . No longer just a monster comic, SWAMP THING evolved into a metaphysical meditation, with our muck-encrusted mockery of a man serving as witness, participant, and oft-unwilling catalyst to historical events . . .

Veitch leaned hard into mythology, time, history, and symbolism, making Swamp Thing an archetypal traveler . . . The bog god, trapped in an amber gem, remained helpless and desperate to return home to his wife, **Abby Arcane** . . . and to raise their unborn child, his elemental successor, **the Sprout** . . .

Locked in an endless temporal cycle, Swamp Thing shambled through prehistory, witnessed pivotal human and metahuman developments, and became a lens through which DC's mystical framework has been reexamined . . . He's experienced World Wars I and II, the Old West, and the fall of Camelot . . . And he's grown . . .

Forgotten heroes have reemerged from obscurity, offering the muck-man wisdom and knowledge useful in battling his archnemesis, the wizard **Anton Arcane** . . . Some readers may have felt challenged, but ol' Johnny's got news for you, folks: *That was the point*. Rick trusted the audience to follow his odyssey toward its epic conclusion, and so many of you rose to the task . . .

Of course, you can't talk about SWAMP THING without mentioning a cocky, trench-coated magician introduced during Moore's tenure: **John Constantine**, who has since drifted into and out of Swamp Thing's life. Fans embraced the mage's irreverence, and when Constantine received his own book, **Jamie Delano's** HELLBLAZER, the crossover possibilities proved boundless . . .

If you've been following HELLBLAZER, you've seen Swamp Thing pop up from time to time, and if you've been reading SWAMP THING, you've seen Constantine manipulate, provoke, and survive . . . But I'll tell ya, kids, if you've overlooked *both* titles, you've been missing out on some of the best storytelling in decades . . .

Trust your pal Johnny: These aren't your typical superhero crossovers . . . We're not talking about cosmic-ray mishaps or friendly spandex team-ups. Just two deeply flawed, deeply *human* figures intersecting at moments of moral and metaphysical crisis—the DC Universe's dark end talking to itself. Ol' Johnny couldn't be prouder . . .

Which brings us, at last, to SWAMP THING #88. Without giving too much away (Johnny's friendly, not reckless!), this issue is a culmination of themes Veitch has been weaving since he first dipped a toe into the marsh: time as a living force, the cost of awareness, and Swamp Thing's role as something *bigger* . . .

Issue #88 elevates the saga to a new level, with a *divine* crossover that fans will be discussing for years . . . It's bold, cerebral, and unapologetically strange. Most importantly, it's Swamp Thing being Swamp Thing . . .

Look, folks, comics are changing . . . The 1990s are knocking at the door, creators are pushing boundaries, and with titles like Moore's WATCHMEN, **Grant Morrison's** ANIMAL MAN, and **Mike Grell's** GREEN ARROW on shelves, readers are hungry for more stories that *mean* something. SWAMP THING has been providing *that* for years . . .

From Wein and Wrightson's gothic horror to Moore's philosophical reinvention to Veitch's ambitious odyssey. . . the epic saga of Alec Holland has led us to this very important and *biblical* moment . . .

So I've got one piece of advice: **Stick around** . . . because the swamp always has another tale to tell. Johnny's tried to do right bayou . . . and that's no swamp gas . . .

—Johnny DC

Written by Rich Handley

DC ✓ LIST
THIS WEEK

NEW TITANS 57
Just as the Titans get back to business, along comes Wildebeest for a rematch! ◆▶

ANIMAL MAN 13
Buddy is anxious to get back to his family and resume a normal life . . . but his problems are just beginning. ■▶

BLACKHAWK 5
Introducing the mysterious "Circus" organization within the CIA—will it destroy the Blackhawks? ■▶▲

CHECKMATE! 19
There are lots of pieces to pick up to try to rebuild Checkmate . . . but is it too little too late? ■▶

DOOM PATROL 24
The Doom Patrol attacks Red Jack in his mysterious home . . . all to save Lodestone's life. ■▶

L.E.G.I.O.N. '89 6
Dox's new police force attacks Cairn's biggest drug lord—Garryn Bek's father-in-law. ■▶

SANDMAN 7
Sandman battles Dr. Destiny for control of the realm of dreams. ■▶▲

NEW GUARDIANS 10
As Tom Kalmaku comes to grips with his power, his role in the destiny of the New Guardians becomes essential. ■▶

AQUAMAN 2
Mera escapes from the psychiatric center, while Aquaman and his loyal resistance fighters battle the invaders. ●

POWER OF THE ATOM 14
Humbug is back—and this time he's hitting The Atom where he "really" lives! ●

STARMAN 12
This is it—the final showdown with the Power Elite as death comes a-calling at the Hutchings Institute. ●

ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN 456
With Superman on his way back to Earth, Intergang makes a last-ditch attempt to silence the spy within their ranks. Plus—Gangbuster is back! ●

JUSTICE LEAGUE EUROPE 4
From Europe to Bialya, the JLE is mad and they're bringing the battle straight to the Queen Bee herself. ●

SWAMP THING 88
Cast back through time, Swamp Thing will meet a carpenter who will change the trajectory of his life. ■▶▲

LEGEND

● Standard Format	★ Prestige Format
■ New Format	☐ Graphic Novel
◆ Deluxe Format	◫ Collected Edition
▶ Available at Select Outlets	▲ Suggested for Mature Readers

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RING TIME! WORLDS COLLIDE AS THE EPIC CROSSOVER EVENT FROM WRITER IAN FLYNN AND ARTIST ADAM BRYCE THOMAS RETURNS
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GO FAST! FIVE-ISSUE SERIES STARTING IN MAY
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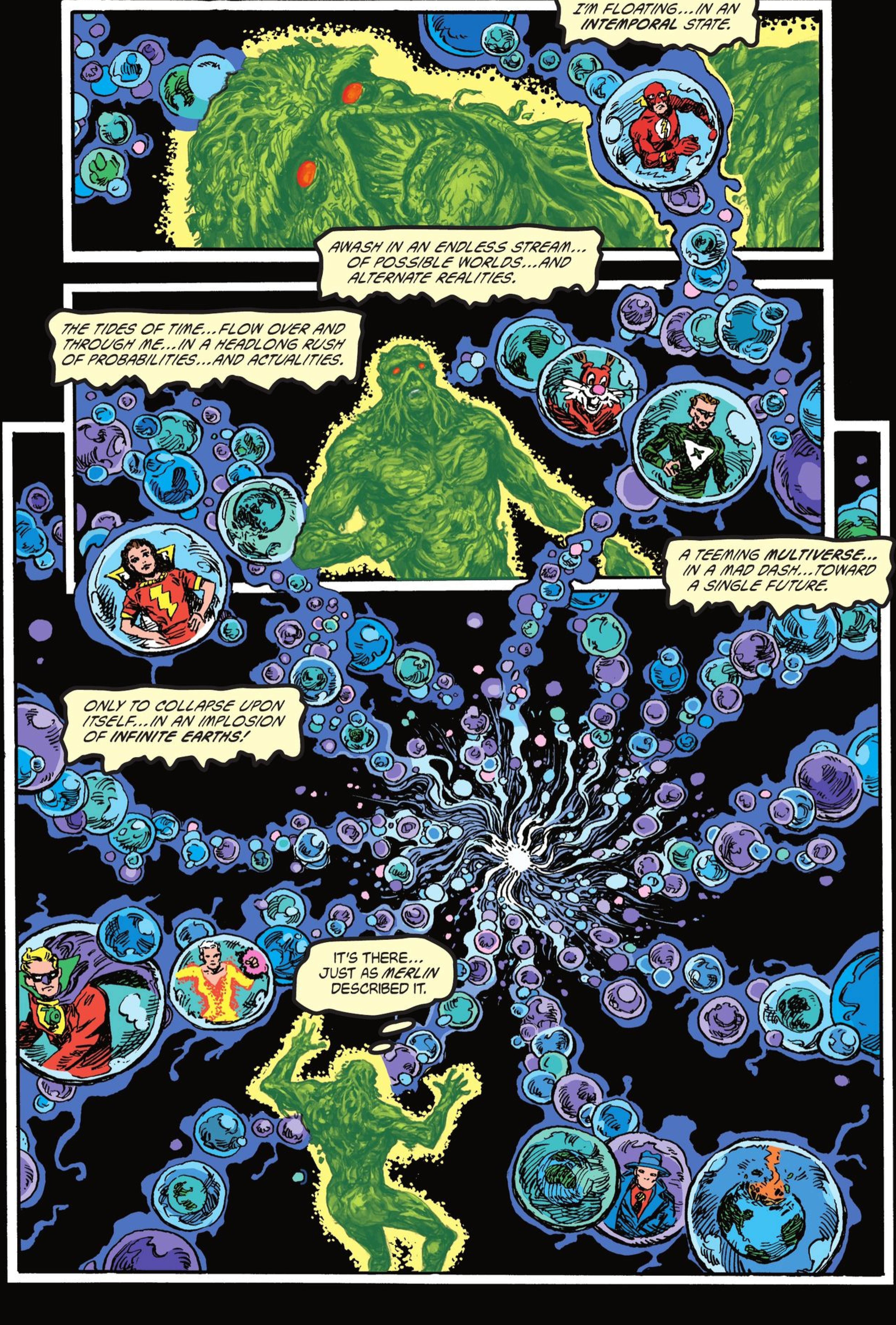
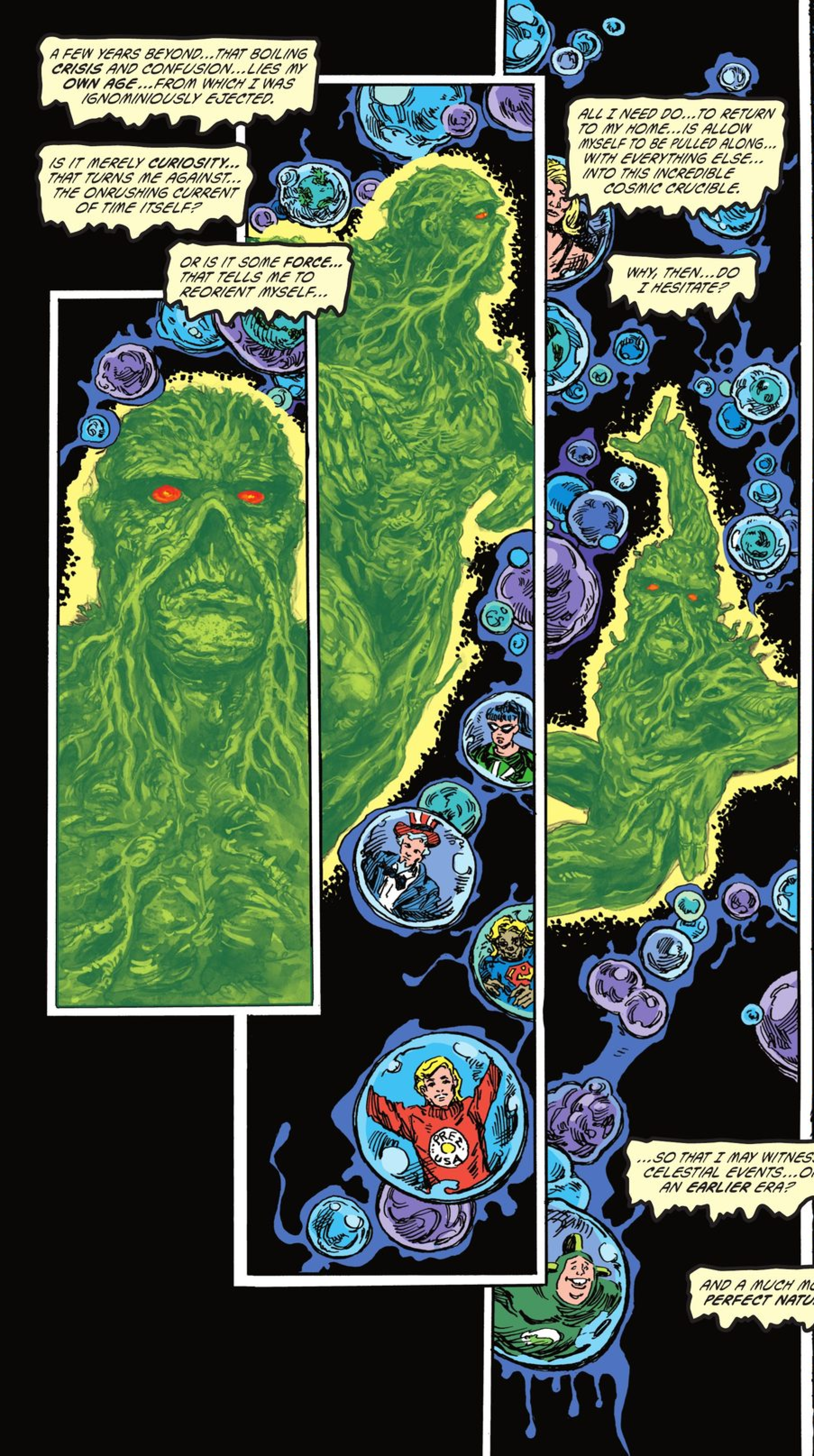
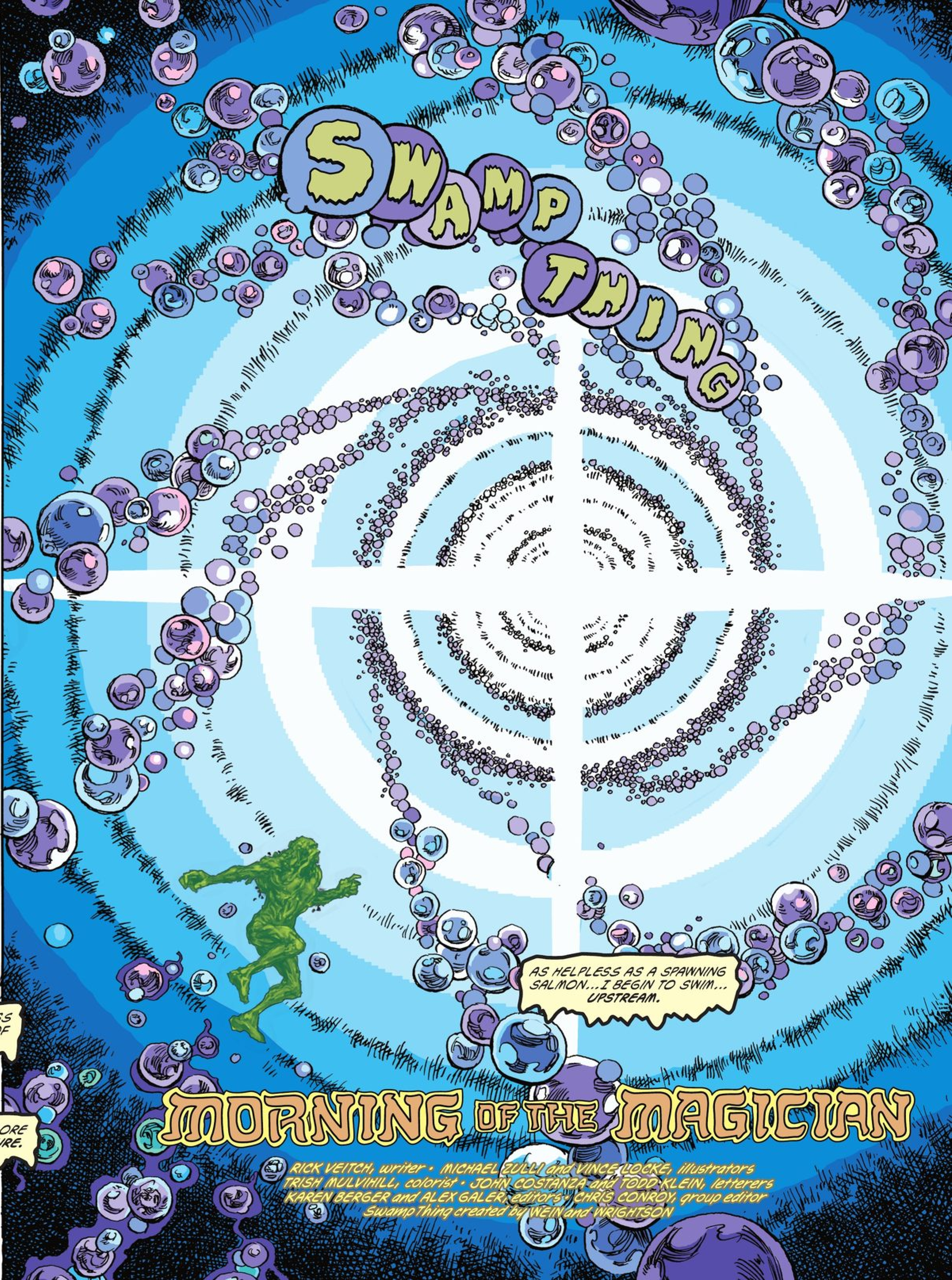
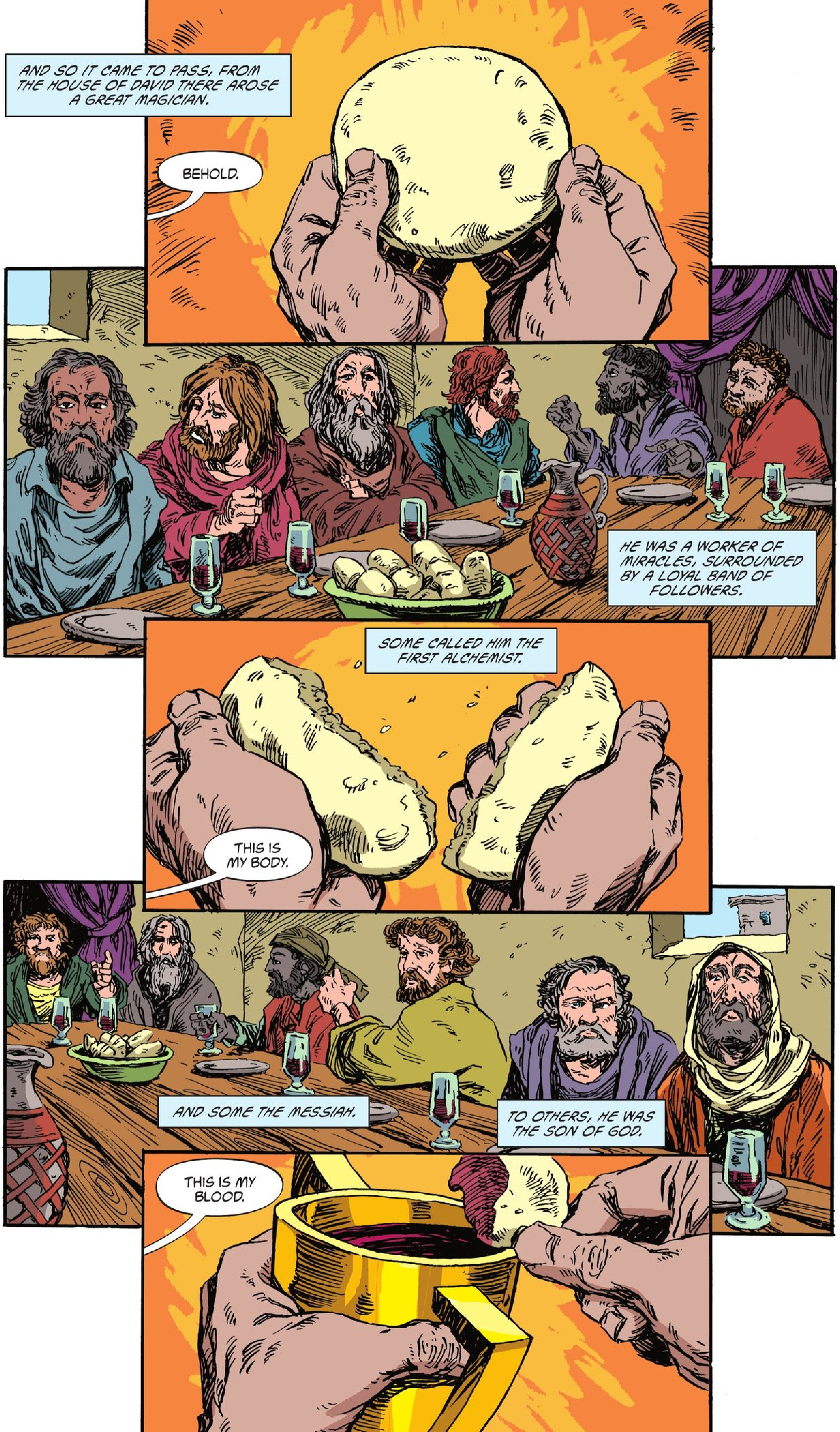
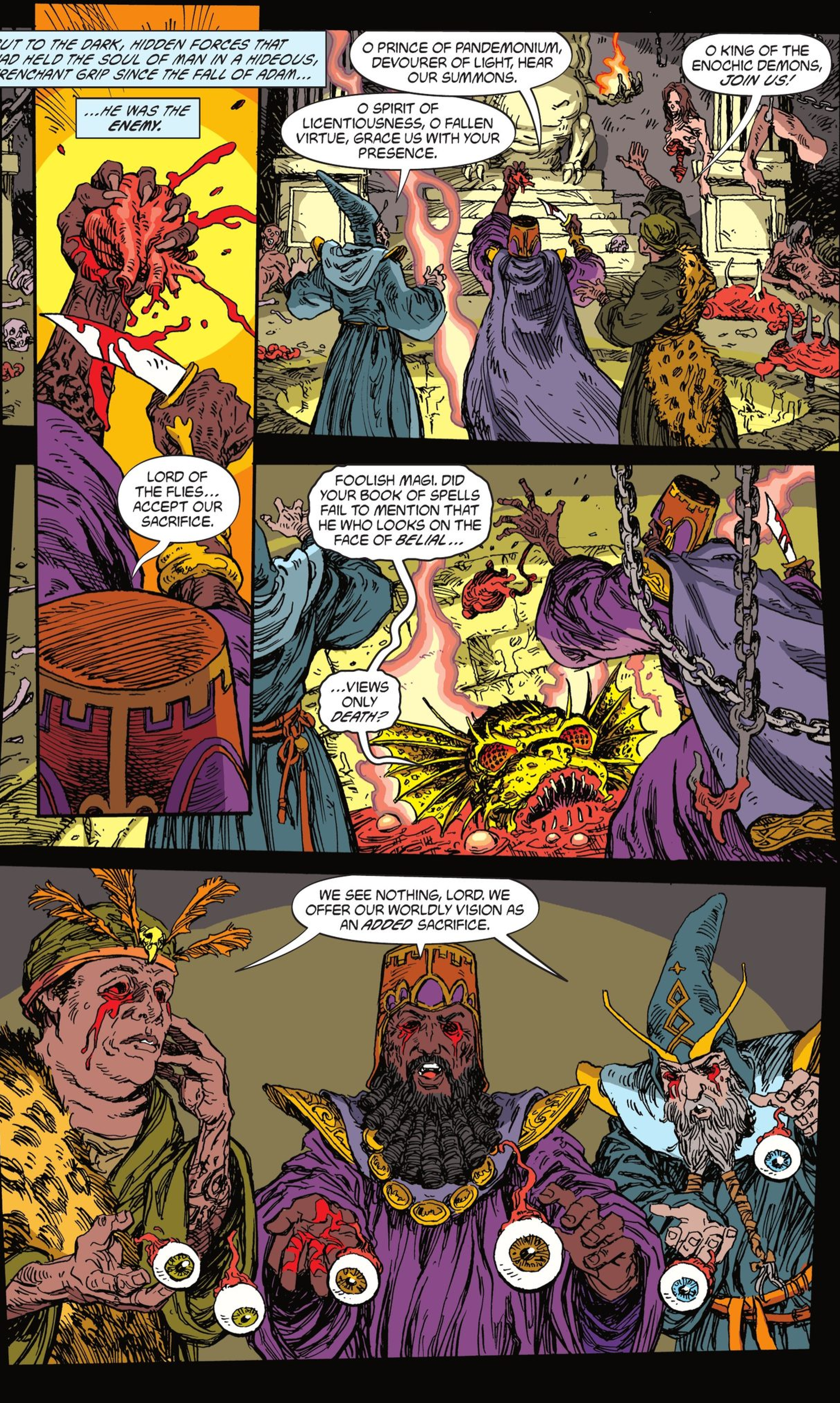
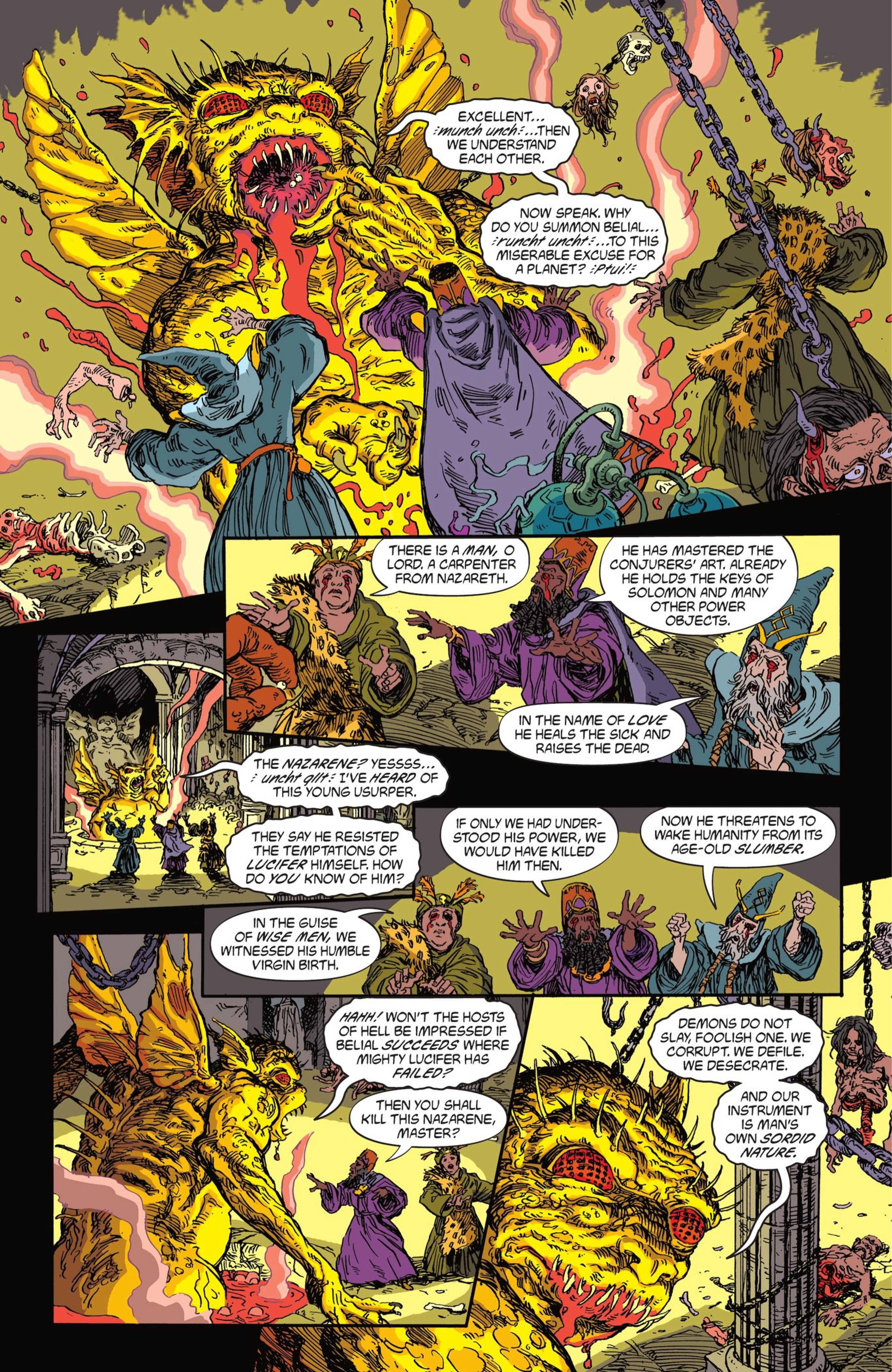

I'M FLOATING...IN AN **INTEMPORAL** STATE.
AWASH IN AN ENDLESS STREAM... OF POSSIBLE WORLDS...AND ALTERNATE REALITIES.
THE TIDES OF TIME...FLOW OVER AND THROUGH ME...IN A HEADLONG RUSH OF PROBABILITIES...AND ACTUALITIES.
A TEEMING **MULTIVERSE**... IN A MAD DASH...TOWARD A SINGLE FUTURE.
ONLY TO COLLAPSE UPON ITSELF...IN AN IMPLOSION OF **INFINITE EARTHS!**
IT'S THERE... JUST AS *MERLIN* DESCRIBED IT.

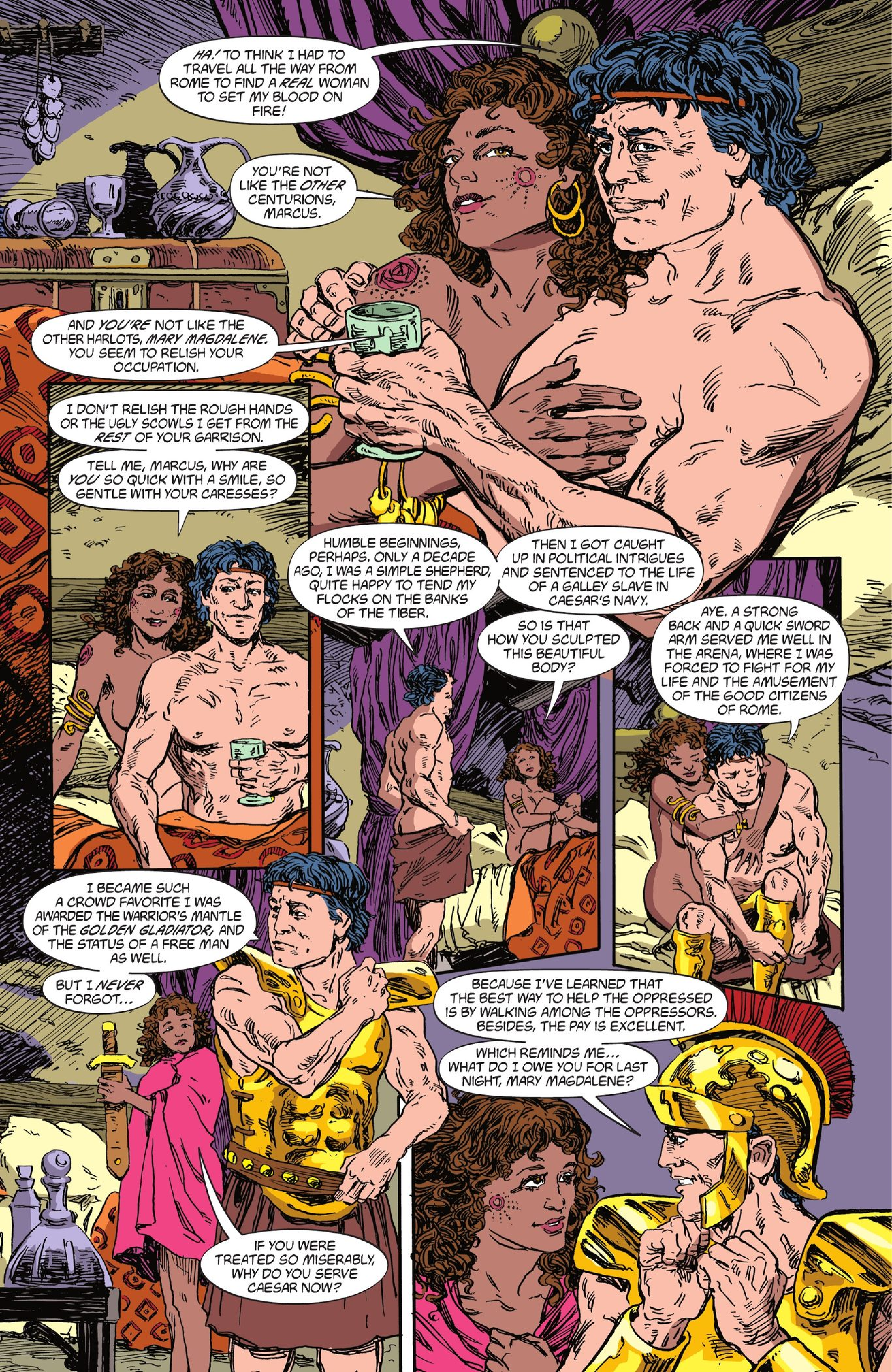

A FEW YEARS BEYOND...THAT BOILING CRISIS AND CONFUSION...LIES MY OWN AGE...FROM WHICH I WAS IGNOMINIOUSLY EJECTED.
IS IT MERELY CURIOSITY... THAT TURNS ME AGAINST... THE ONRUSHING CURRENT OF TIME ITSELF?
OR IS IT SOME FORCE... THAT TELLS ME TO REORIENT MYSELF...
...SO THAT I MAY WITNESS CELESTIAL EVENTS...OF AN EARLIER ERA?
AND A MUCH MORE PERFECT NATURE.
ALL I NEED DO...TO RETURN TO MY HOME...IS ALLOW MYSELF TO BE PULLED ALONG... WITH EVERYTHING ELSE... INTO THIS INCREDIBLE COSMIC CRUCIBLE.
WHY, THEN...DO I HESITATE?
PREZ USA

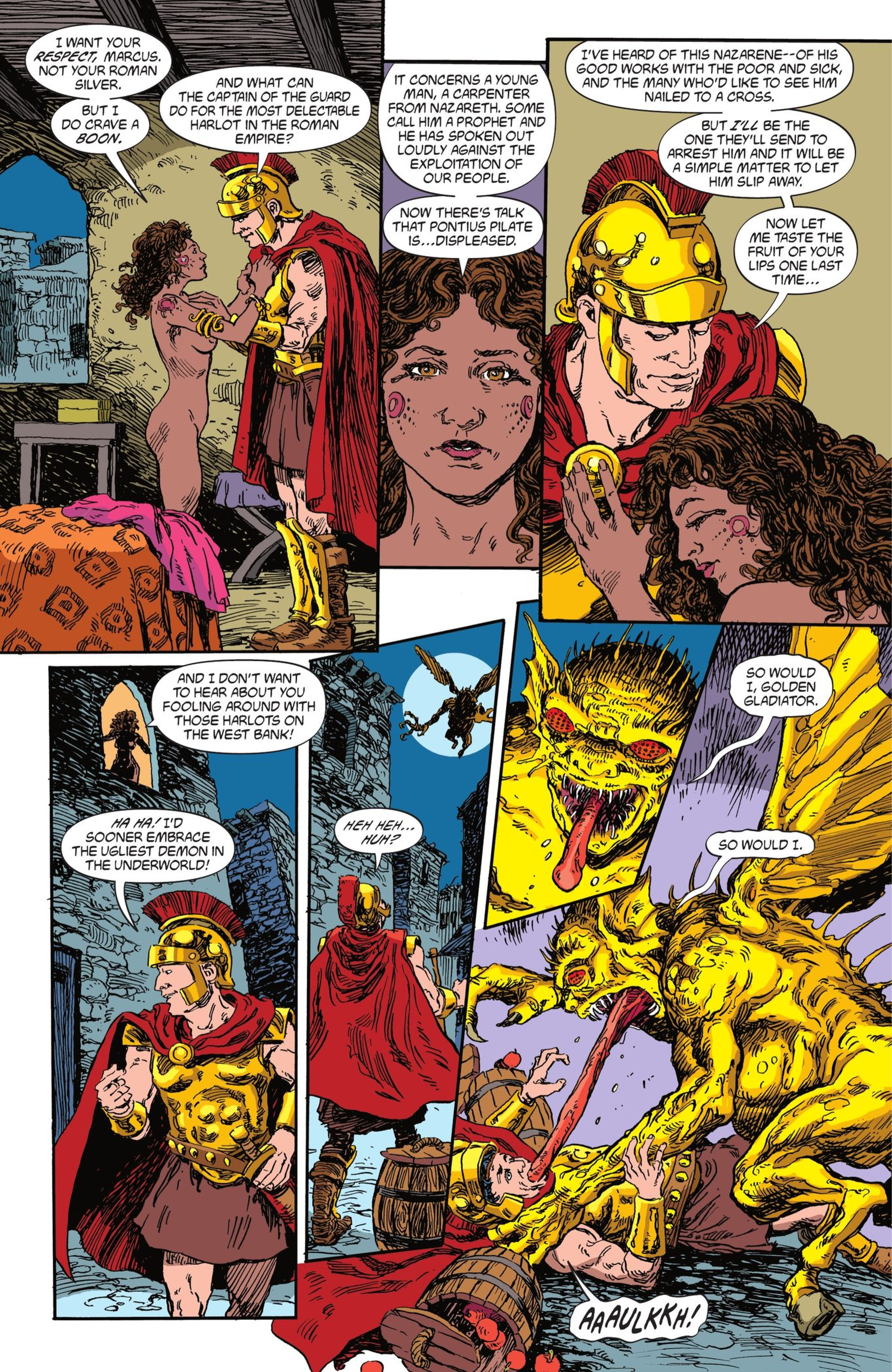

SWAMP THING
AS HELPLESS AS A SPAWNING SALMON...I BEGIN TO SWIM... UPSTREAM.
MORNING OF THE MAGICIAN
RICK VEITCH, writer • MICHAEL ZULLI and VINCE LOCKE, illustrators
TRISH MULVIHILL, colorist • JOHN COSTANZA and TODD KLEIN, letterers
KAREN BERGER and ALEX GALER, editors • CHRIS CONROY, group editor
Swamp Thing created by WEIN and WRIGHTSON

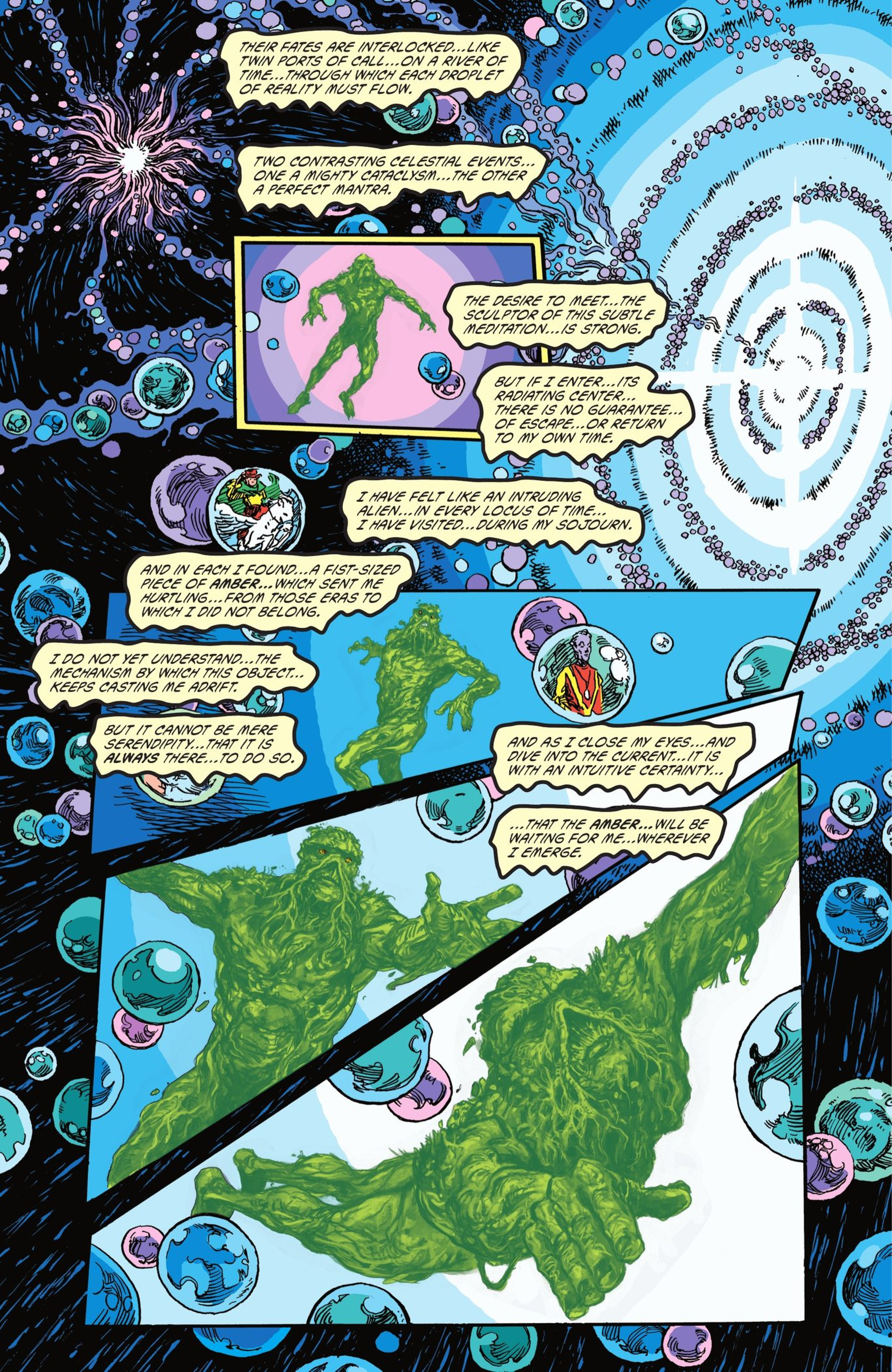

AND SO IT CAME TO PASS, FROM THE HOUSE OF DAVID THERE AROSE A GREAT MAGICIAN.
BEHOLD.
HE WAS A WORKER OF MIRACLES, SURROUNDED BY A LOYAL BAND OF FOLLOWERS.
SOME CALLED HIM THE FIRST ALCHEMIST.
THIS IS MY BODY.
AND SOME THE MESSIAH.
TO OTHERS, HE WAS THE SON OF GOD.
THIS IS MY BLOOD.

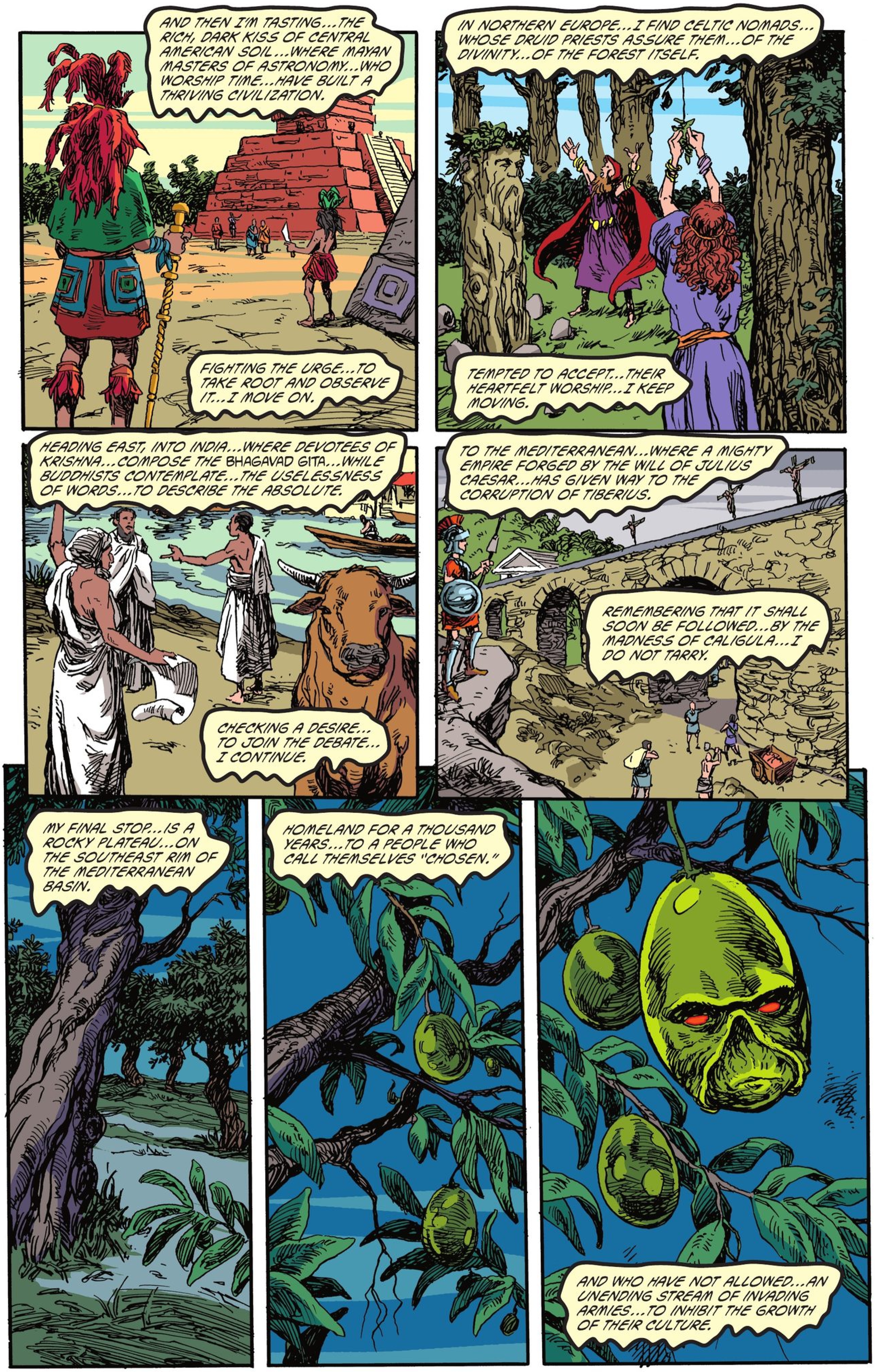

BUT TO THE DARK, HIDDEN FORCES THAT HAD HELD THE SOUL OF MAN IN A HIDEOUS, TRENCHANT GRIP SINCE THE FALL OF ADAM...
...HE WAS THE *ENEMY.*
O PRINCE OF PANDEMONIUM, DEVOURER OF LIGHT, HEAR OUR SUMMONS.
O SPIRIT OF LICENTIOUSNESS, O FALLEN VIRTUE, GRACE US WITH YOUR PRESENCE.
O KING OF THE ENOCHIC DEMONS, *JOIN US!*
LORD OF THE FLIES... ACCEPT OUR SACRIFICE.
FOOLISH MAGI. DID YOUR BOOK OF SPELLS FAIL TO *MENTION* THAT HE WHO LOOKS ON THE FACE OF *BELIAL...*
...VIEWS ONLY *DEATH?*
WE SEE NOTHING, LORD. WE OFFER OUR WORLDLY VISION AS AN *ADDED* SACRIFICE.

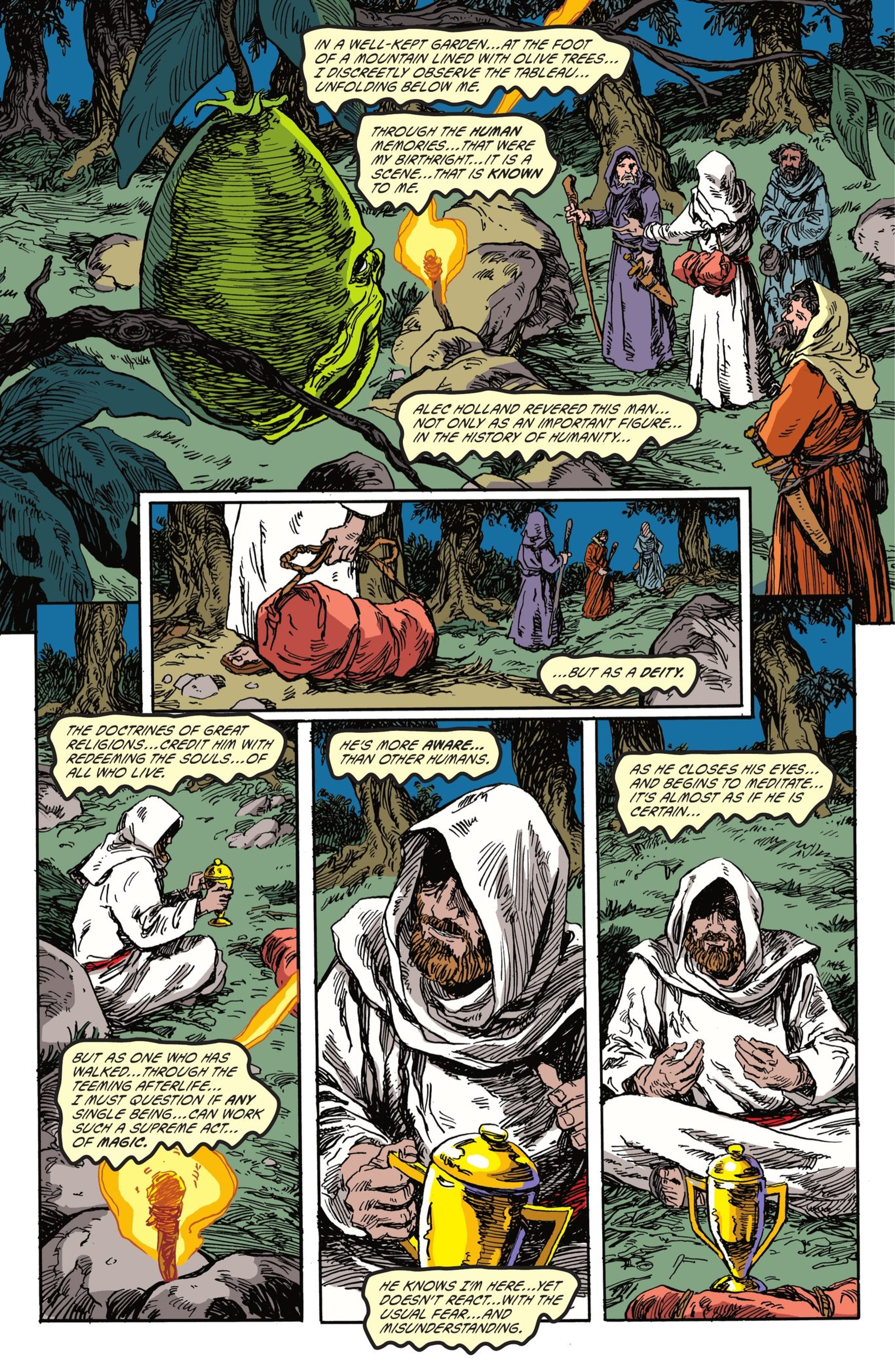

EXCELLENT... munch unch... THEN WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.
NOW SPEAK. WHY DO YOU SUMMON BELIAL... runcht uncht... TO THIS MISERABLE EXCUSE FOR A PLANET? Ptui!
THERE IS A *MAN,* O LORD. A CARPENTER FROM NAZARETH.
HE HAS *MASTERED* THE CONJURERS' ART. ALREADY HE HOLDS THE KEYS OF SOLOMON AND MANY OTHER POWER OBJECTS.
IN THE NAME OF *LOVE* HE HEALS THE SICK AND RAISES THE DEAD.
THE *NAZARENE?* YESSSS... uncht glt I'VE *HEARD* OF THIS YOUNG USURPER.
THEY SAY HE RESISTED THE TEMPTATIONS OF *LUCIFER* HIMSELF. HOW DO *YOU* KNOW OF HIM?
IN THE GUISE OF *WISE MEN,* WE WITNESSED HIS HUMBLE VIRGIN BIRTH.
IF ONLY WE HAD UNDERSTOOD HIS POWER, WE WOULD HAVE KILLED HIM THEN.
NOW HE THREATENS TO WAKE HUMANITY FROM ITS AGE-OLD *SLUMBER.*
HAHH! WON'T THE HOSTS OF HELL BE IMPRESSED IF BELIAL *SUCCEEDS* WHERE MIGHTY LUCIFER HAS *FAILED?*
THEN YOU SHALL KILL THIS NAZARENE, MASTER?
DEMONS DO NOT SLAY, FOOLISH ONE. WE CORRUPT. WE DEFILE. WE DESECRATE.
AND OUR INSTRUMENT IS MAN'S OWN *SORDID NATURE.*

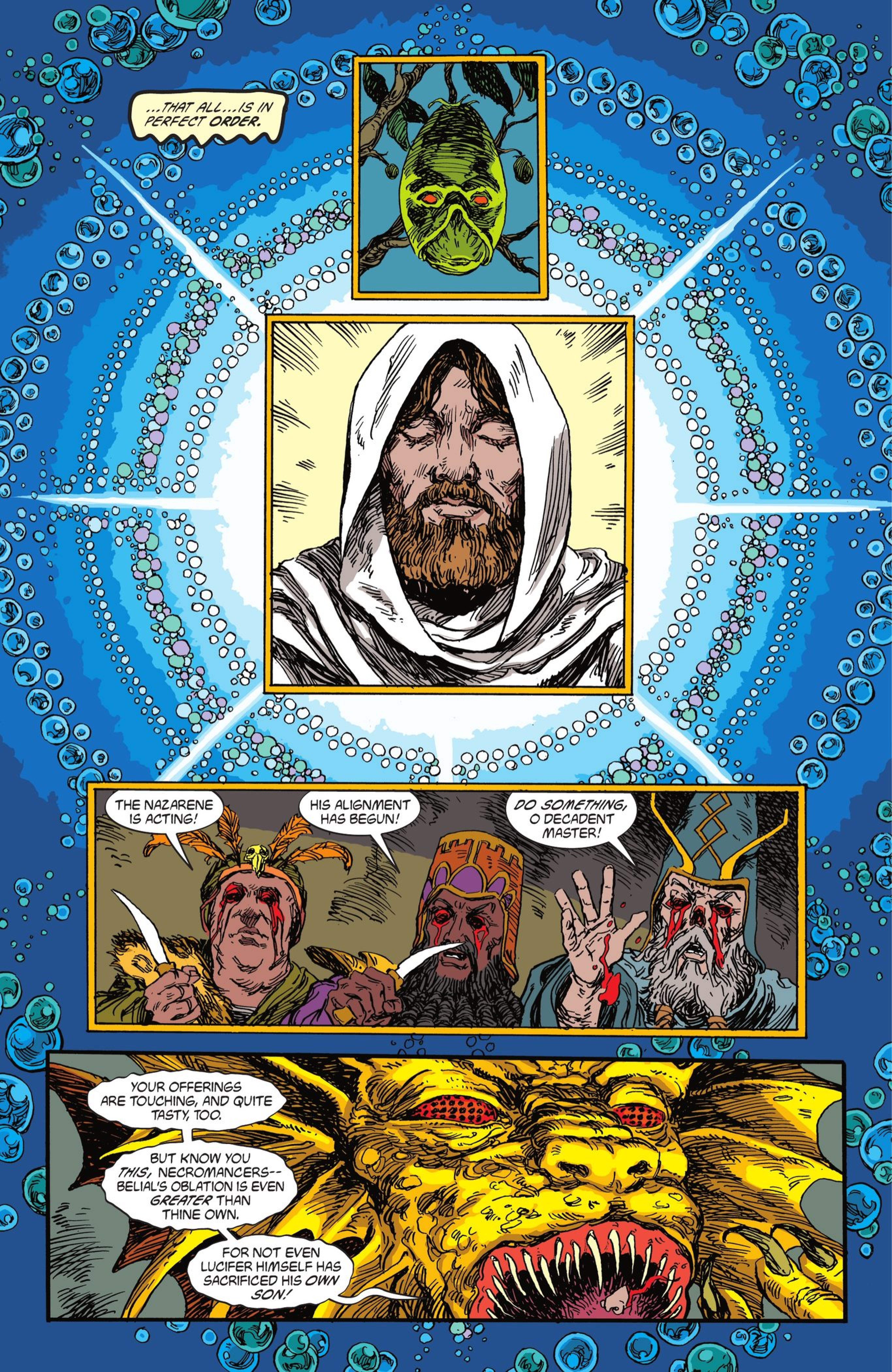

HA! TO THINK I HAD TO TRAVEL ALL THE WAY FROM ROME TO FIND A REAL WOMAN TO SET MY BLOOD ON FIRE!
YOU'RE NOT LIKE THE OTHER CENTURIONS, MARCUS.
AND YOU'RE NOT LIKE THE OTHER HARLOTS, MARY MAGDALENE. YOU SEEM TO RELISH YOUR OCCUPATION.
I DON'T RELISH THE ROUGH HANDS OR THE UGLY SCOWLS I GET FROM THE REST OF YOUR GARRISON.
TELL ME, MARCUS, WHY ARE YOU SO QUICK WITH A SMILE, SO GENTLE WITH YOUR CARESSES?
HUMBLE BEGINNINGS, PERHAPS. ONLY A DECADE AGO, I WAS A SIMPLE SHEPHERD, QUITE HAPPY TO TEND MY FLOCKS ON THE BANKS OF THE TIBER.
THEN I GOT CAUGHT UP IN POLITICAL INTRIGUES AND SENTENCED TO THE LIFE OF A GALLEY SLAVE IN CAESAR'S NAVY.
SO IS THAT HOW YOU SCULPTED THIS BEAUTIFUL BODY?
AYE. A STRONG BACK AND A QUICK SWORD ARM SERVED ME WELL IN THE ARENA, WHERE I WAS FORCED TO FIGHT FOR MY LIFE AND THE AMUSEMENT OF THE GOOD CITIZENS OF ROME.
I BECAME SUCH A CROWD FAVORITE I WAS AWARDED THE WARRIOR'S MANTLE OF THE GOLDEN GLADIATOR, AND THE STATUS OF A FREE MAN AS WELL.
BUT I NEVER FORGOT...
IF YOU WERE TREATED SO MISERABLY, WHY DO YOU SERVE CAESAR NOW?
BECAUSE I'VE LEARNED THAT THE BEST WAY TO HELP THE OPPRESSED IS BY WALKING AMONG THE OPPRESSORS. BESIDES, THE PAY IS EXCELLENT.
WHICH REMINDS ME... WHAT DO I OWE YOU FOR LAST NIGHT, MARY MAGDALENE?

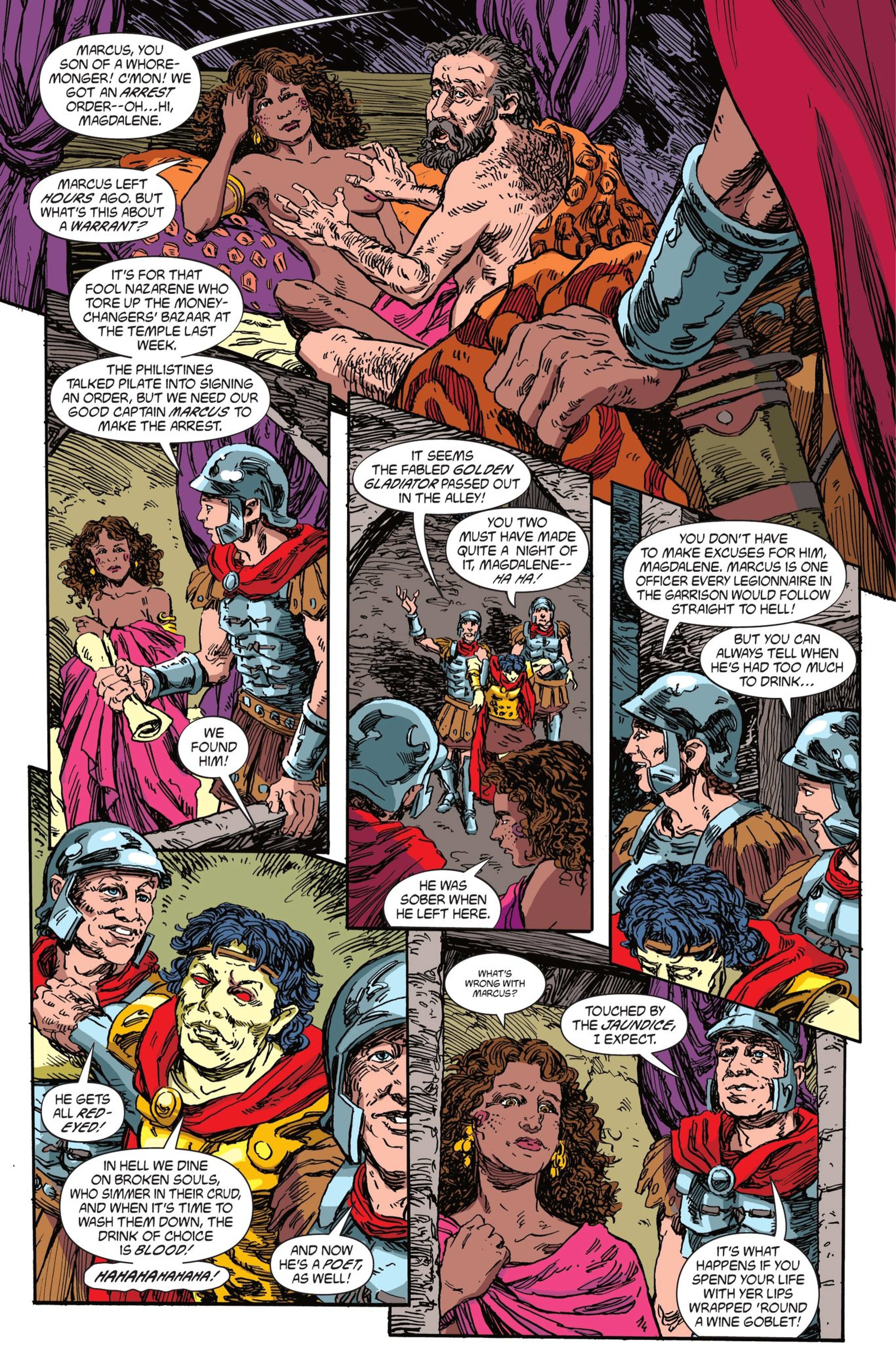

I WANT YOUR *RESPECT,* MARCUS. NOT YOUR ROMAN SILVER.
BUT I DO CRAVE A *BOON.*
AND WHAT CAN THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD DO FOR THE MOST DELECTABLE HARLOT IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE?
IT CONCERNS A YOUNG MAN, A CARPENTER FROM NAZARETH. SOME CALL HIM A PROPHET AND HE HAS SPOKEN OUT LOUDLY AGAINST THE EXPLOITATION OF OUR PEOPLE.
NOW THERE'S TALK THAT PONTIUS PILATE IS...DISPLEASED.
I'VE HEARD OF THIS NAZARENE--OF HIS GOOD WORKS WITH THE POOR AND SICK, AND THE MANY WHO'D LIKE TO SEE HIM NAILED TO A CROSS.
BUT *I'LL* BE THE ONE THEY'LL SEND TO ARREST HIM AND IT WILL BE A SIMPLE MATTER TO LET HIM SLIP AWAY.
NOW LET ME TASTE THE FRUIT OF YOUR LIPS ONE LAST TIME...
AND I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOU FOOLING AROUND WITH THOSE HARLOTS ON THE WEST BANK!
HA HA! I'D SOONER EMBRACE THE UGLIEST DEMON IN THE UNDERWORLD!
HEH HEH... HUH?
SO WOULD I, GOLDEN GLADIATOR.
SO WOULD I.
AAAULKKH!

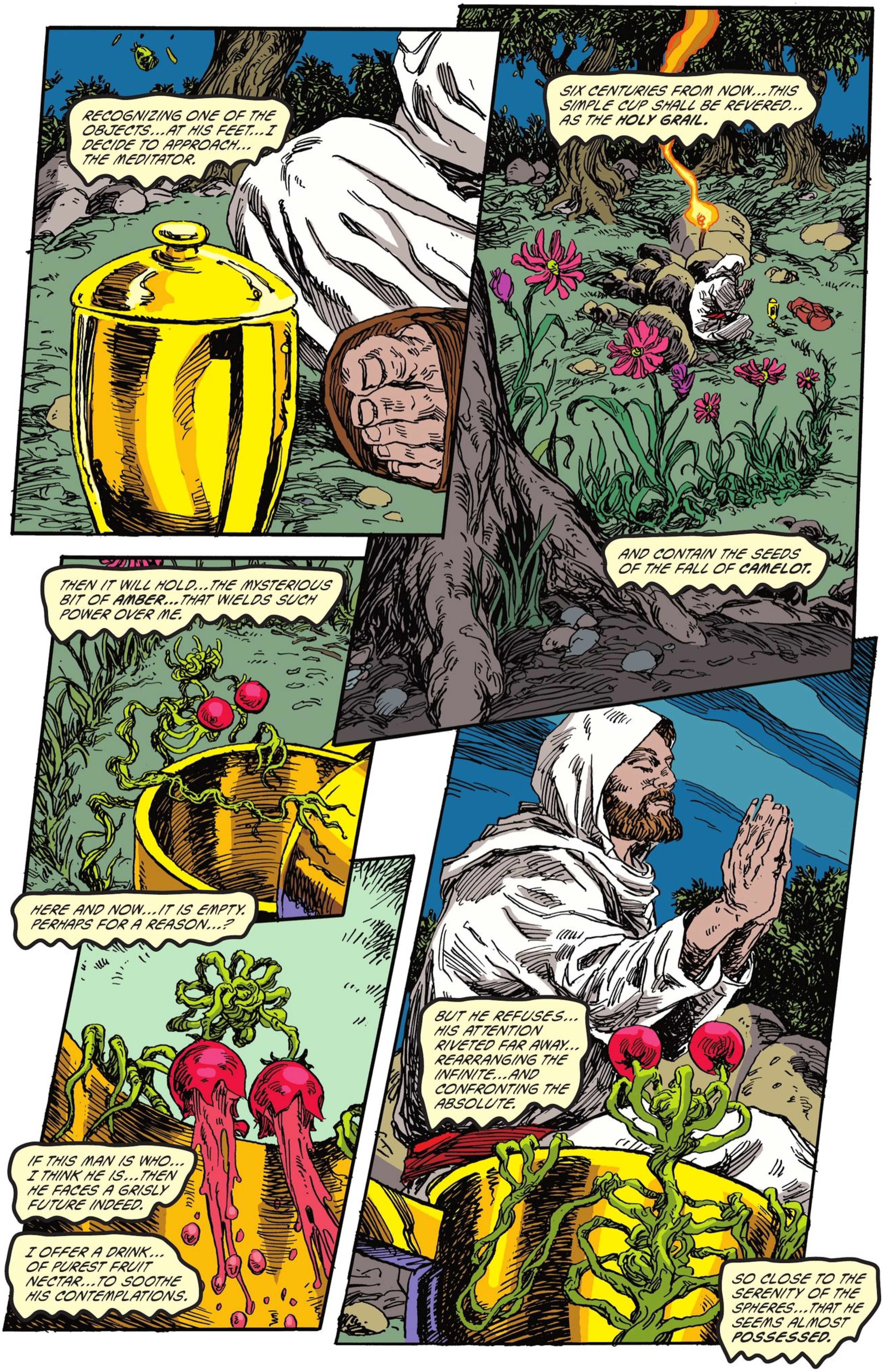

THEIR FATES ARE INTERLOCKED...LIKE TWIN PORTS OF CALL...ON A RIVER OF TIME...THROUGH WHICH EACH DROPLET OF REALITY MUST FLOW.
TWO CONTRASTING CELESTIAL EVENTS... ONE A MIGHTY CATACLYSM...THE OTHER A PERFECT MANTRA.
THE DESIRE TO MEET...THE SCULPTOR OF THIS SUBTLE MEDITATION...IS STRONG.
BUT IF I ENTER...ITS RADIATING CENTER... THERE IS NO GUARANTEE... OF ESCAPE...OR RETURN TO MY OWN TIME.
I HAVE FELT LIKE AN INTRUDING ALIEN...IN EVERY LOCUS OF TIME... I HAVE VISITED...DURING MY SOJOURN.
AND IN EACH I FOUND...A FIST-SIZED PIECE OF **AMBER...** WHICH SENT ME HURTLING...FROM THOSE ERAS TO WHICH I DID NOT BELONG.
I DO NOT YET UNDERSTAND...THE MECHANISM BY WHICH THIS OBJECT... KEEPS CASTING ME ADRIFT.
BUT IT CANNOT BE MERE SERENDIPITY...THAT IT IS **ALWAYS** THERE...TO DO SO.
AND AS I CLOSE MY EYES...AND DIVE INTO THE CURRENT...IT IS WITH AN INTUITIVE CERTAINTY...
...THAT THE **AMBER...** WILL BE WAITING FOR ME...WHEREVER I EMERGE.

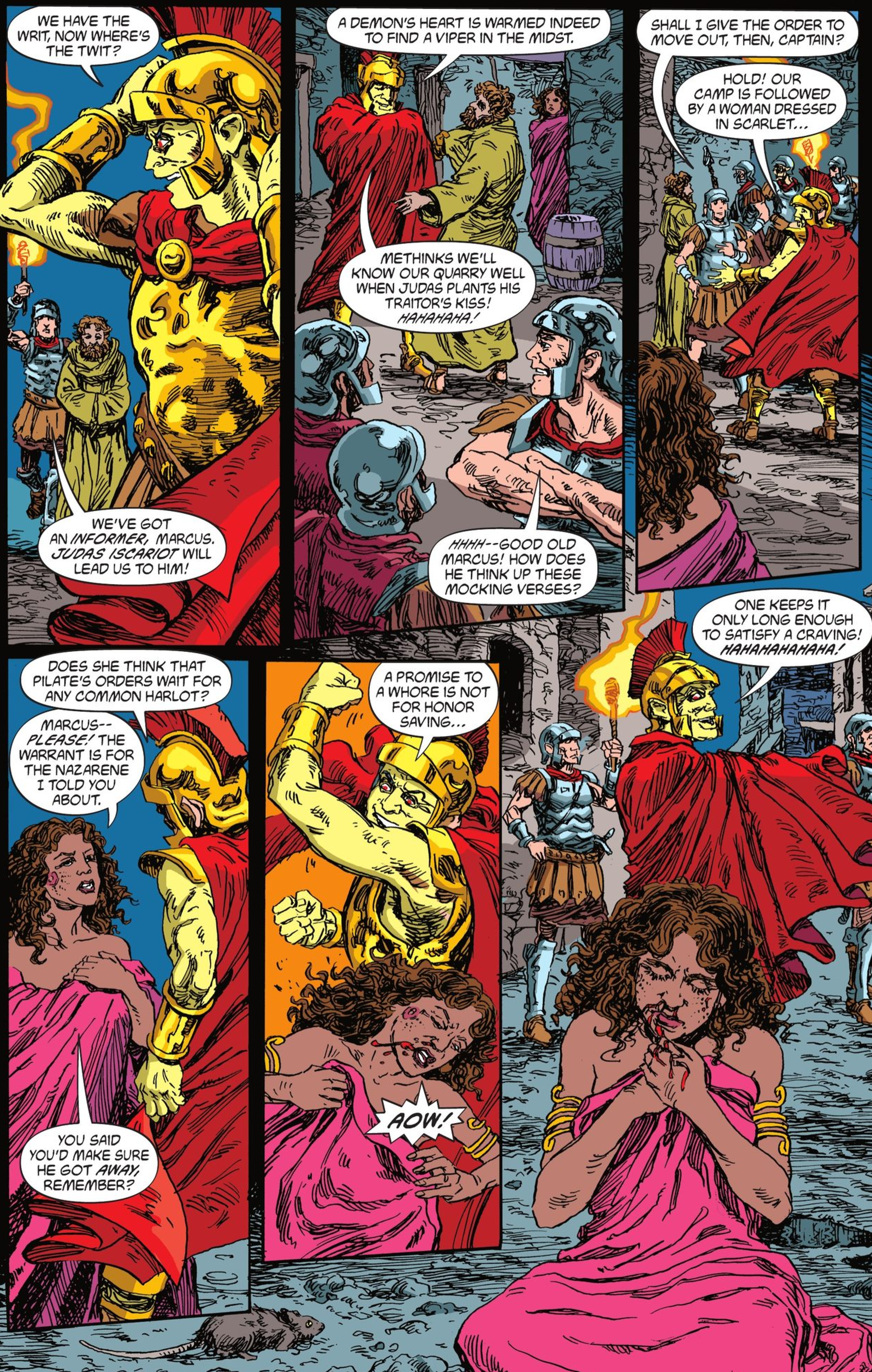

AND THEN I'M TASTING...THE RICH, DARK KISS OF CENTRAL AMERICAN SOIL...WHERE MAYAN MASTERS OF ASTRONOMY...WHO WORSHIP TIME...HAVE BUILT A THRIVING CIVILIZATION.
FIGHTING THE URGE...TO TAKE ROOT AND OBSERVE IT...I MOVE ON.
IN NORTHERN EUROPE...I FIND CELTIC NOMADS... WHOSE DRUID PRIESTS ASSURE THEM...OF THE DIVINITY...OF THE FOREST ITSELF.
TEMPTED TO ACCEPT...THEIR HEARTFELT WORSHIP...I KEEP MOVING.
HEADING EAST, INTO INDIA...WHERE DEVOTEES OF KRISHNA...COMPOSE THE BHAGAVAD GITA...WHILE BUDDHISTS CONTEMPLATE...THE USELESSNESS OF WORDS...TO DESCRIBE THE ABSOLUTE.
CHECKING A DESIRE... TO JOIN THE DEBATE... I CONTINUE.
TO THE MEDITERRANEAN...WHERE A MIGHTY EMPIRE FORGED BY THE WILL OF JULIUS CAESAR...HAS GIVEN WAY TO THE CORRUPTION OF TIBERIUS.
REMEMBERING THAT IT SHALL SOON BE FOLLOWED...BY THE MADNESS OF CALIGULA...I DO NOT TARRY.
MY FINAL STOP...IS A ROCKY PLATEAU...ON THE SOUTHEAST RIM OF THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN.
HOMELAND FOR A THOUSAND YEARS...TO A PEOPLE WHO CALL THEMSELVES "CHOSEN."
AND WHO HAVE NOT ALLOWED...AN UNENDING STREAM OF INVADING ARMIES...TO INHIBIT THE GROWTH OF THEIR CULTURE.

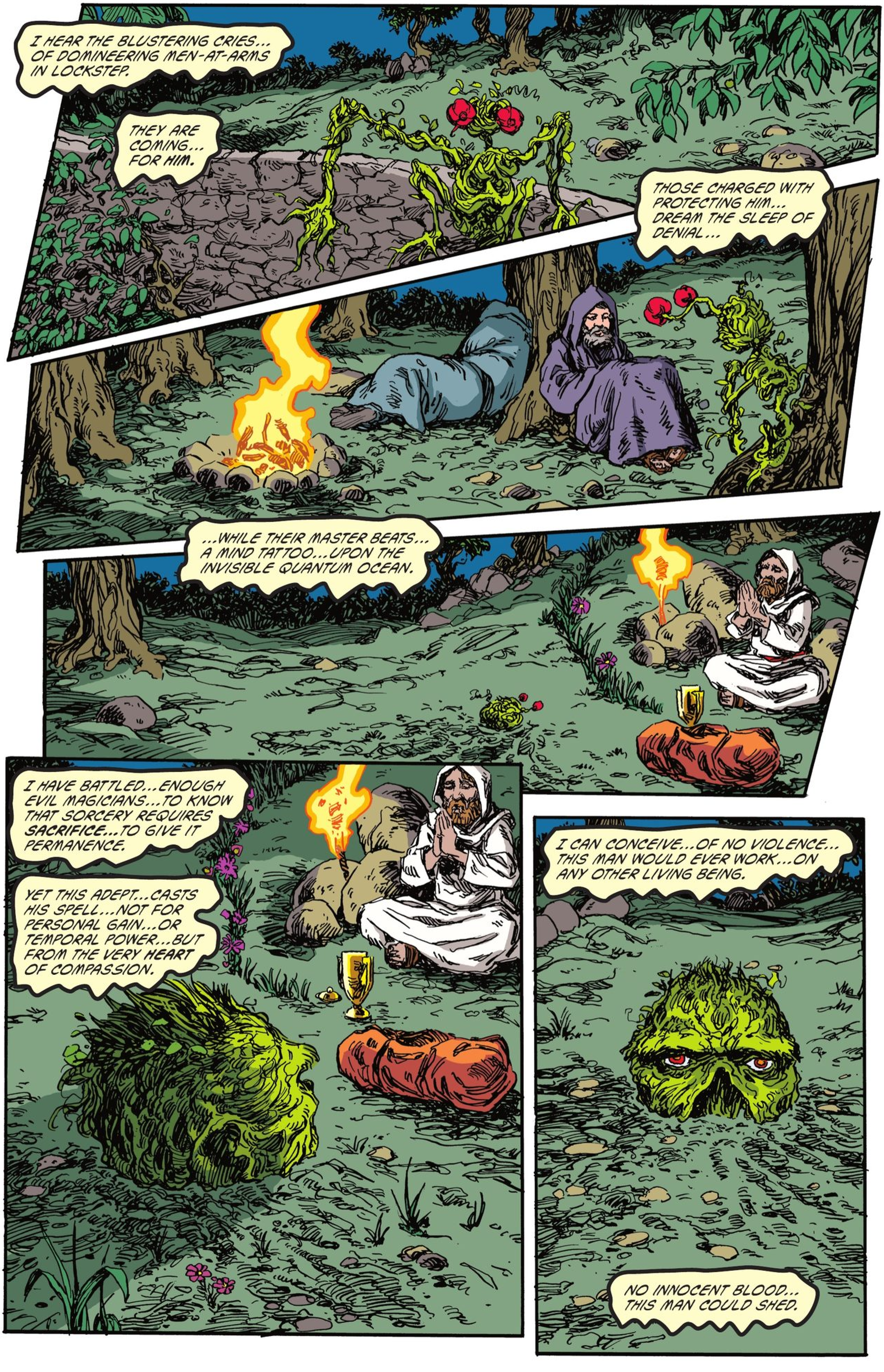

IN A WELL-KEPT GARDEN...AT THE FOOT OF A MOUNTAIN LINED WITH OLIVE TREES... I DISCREETLY OBSERVE THE TABLEAU... UNFOLDING BELOW ME.
THROUGH THE HUMAN MEMORIES...THAT WERE MY BIRTHRIGHT...IT IS A SCENE...THAT IS KNOWN TO ME.
ALEC HOLLAND REVERED THIS MAN... NOT ONLY AS AN IMPORTANT FIGURE... IN THE HISTORY OF HUMANITY...
...BUT AS A DEITY.
THE DOCTRINES OF GREAT RELIGIONS...CREDIT HIM WITH REDEEMING THE SOULS...OF ALL WHO LIVE.
BUT AS ONE WHO HAS WALKED...THROUGH THE TEEMING AFTERLIFE... I MUST QUESTION IF ANY SINGLE BEING...CAN WORK SUCH A SUPREME ACT... OF MAGIC.
HE'S MORE AWARE... THAN OTHER HUMANS.
HE KNOWS I'M HERE...YET DOESN'T REACT...WITH THE USUAL FEAR...AND MISUNDERSTANDING.
AS HE CLOSES HIS EYES... AND BEGINS TO MEDITATE... IT'S ALMOST AS IF HE IS CERTAIN...

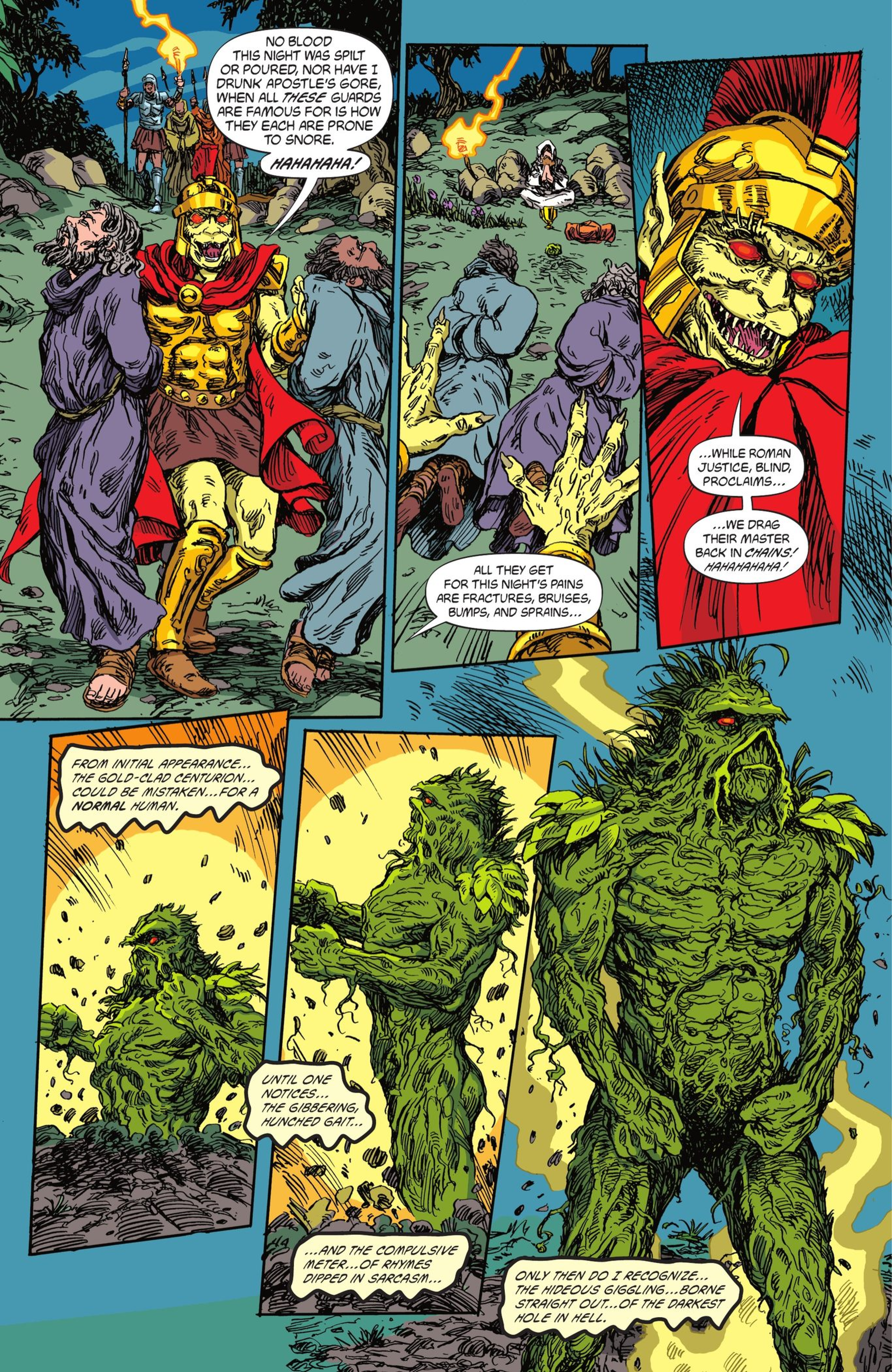

...THAT ALL...IS IN PERFECT *ORDER.*
THE NAZARENE IS ACTING!
HIS ALIGNMENT HAS BEGUN!
DO SOMETHING, O DECADENT MASTER!
YOUR OFFERINGS ARE TOUCHING, AND QUITE TASTY, TOO.
BUT KNOW YOU *THIS,* NECROMANCERS-- BELIAL'S OBLATION IS EVEN *GREATER* THAN THINE OWN.
FOR NOT EVEN LUCIFER HIMSELF HAS SACRIFICED HIS *OWN* SON!

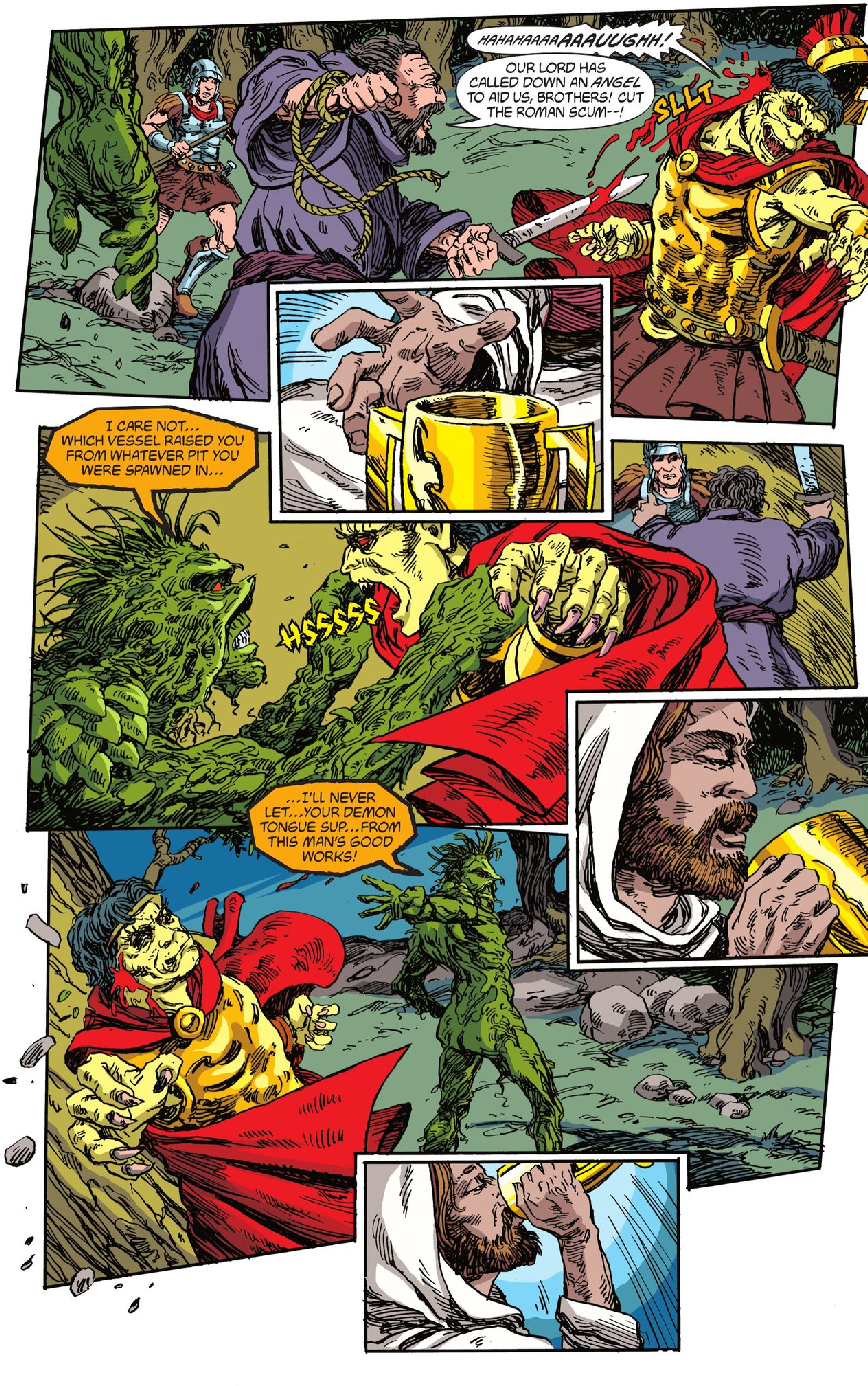

MARCUS, YOU SON OF A WHOREMONGER! C'MON! WE GOT AN *ARREST* ORDER--OH...HI, MAGDALENE.
MARCUS LEFT *HOURS* AGO. BUT WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A *WARRANT?*
IT'S FOR THAT FOOL NAZARENE WHO TORE UP THE MONEY-CHANGERS' BAZAAR AT THE TEMPLE LAST WEEK.
THE PHILISTINES TALKED PILATE INTO SIGNING AN ORDER, BUT WE NEED OUR GOOD CAPTAIN *MARCUS* TO MAKE THE ARREST.
WE FOUND HIM!
IT SEEMS THE FABLED *GOLDEN GLADIATOR* PASSED OUT IN THE ALLEY!
YOU TWO MUST HAVE MADE QUITE A NIGHT OF IT, MAGDALENE-- *HA HA!*
HE WAS SOBER WHEN HE LEFT HERE.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE EXCUSES FOR HIM, MAGDALENE. MARCUS IS ONE OFFICER EVERY LEGIONNAIRE IN THE GARRISON WOULD FOLLOW STRAIGHT TO HELL!
BUT YOU CAN ALWAYS TELL WHEN HE'S HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK...
HE GETS ALL *RED-EYED!*
IN HELL WE DINE ON BROKEN SOULS, WHO SIMMER IN THEIR CRUD, AND WHEN IT'S TIME TO WASH THEM DOWN, THE DRINK OF CHOICE IS *BLOOD!*
HAHAHAHAHAHA!
AND NOW HE'S A *POET,* AS WELL!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH MARCUS?
TOUCHED BY THE *JAUNDICE,* I EXPECT.
IT'S WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU SPEND YOUR LIFE WITH YER LIPS WRAPPED 'ROUND A WINE GOBLET!

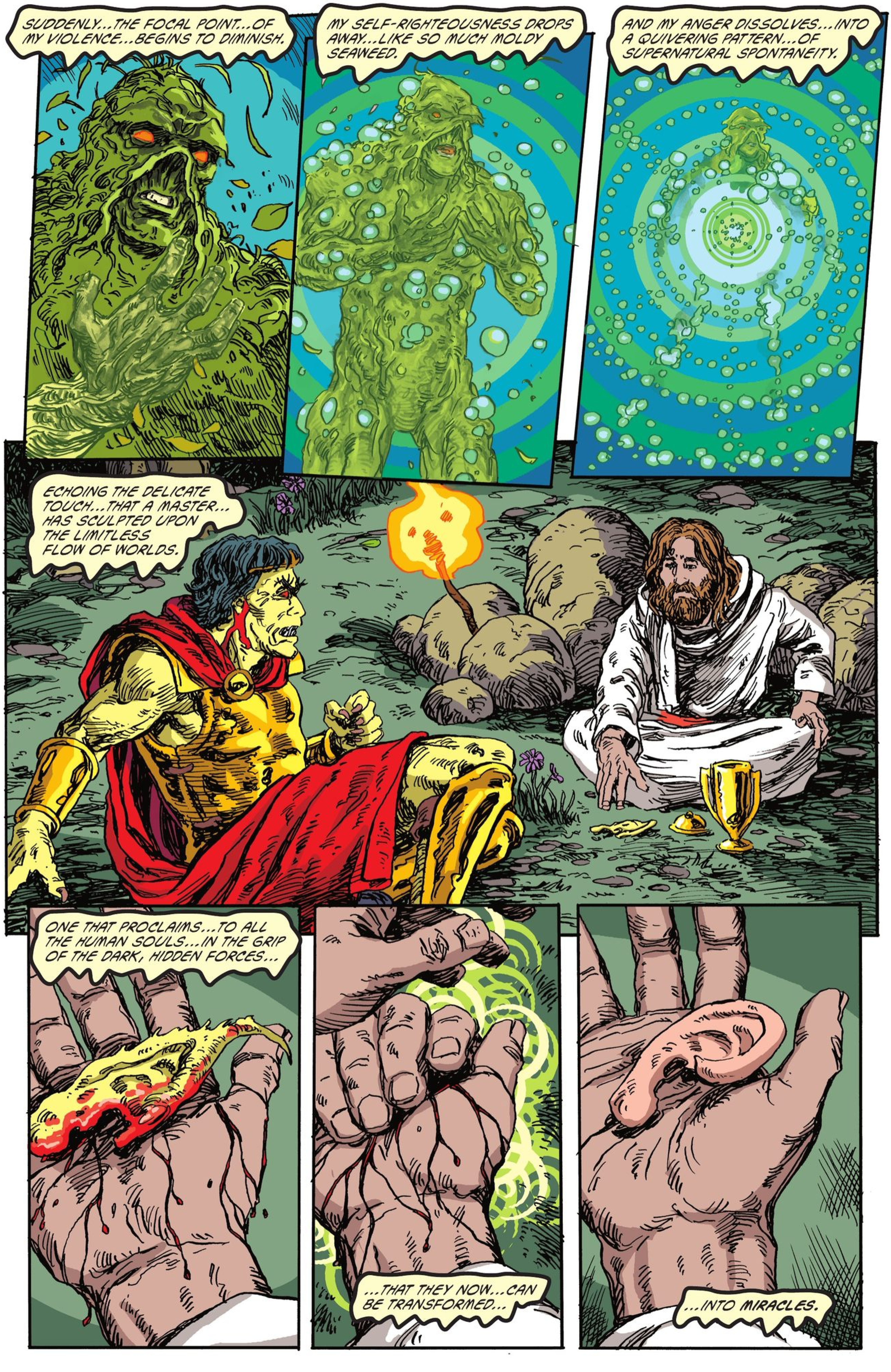

RECOGNIZING ONE OF THE OBJECTS...AT HIS FEET...I DECIDE TO APPROACH... THE MEDITATOR.
SIX CENTURIES FROM NOW...THIS SIMPLE CUP SHALL BE REVERED... AS THE **HOLY GRAIL.**
AND CONTAIN THE SEEDS OF THE FALL OF **CAMELOT.**
THEN IT WILL HOLD...THE MYSTERIOUS BIT OF **AMBER...** THAT WIELDS SUCH POWER OVER ME.
HERE AND NOW...IT IS EMPTY. PERHAPS FOR A REASON...?
IF THIS MAN IS WHO... I THINK HE IS...THEN HE FACES A GRISLY FUTURE INDEED.
I OFFER A DRINK... OF PUREST FRUIT NECTAR...TO SOOTHE HIS CONTEMPLATIONS.
BUT HE REFUSES... HIS ATTENTION RIVETED FAR AWAY... REARRANGING THE INFINITE...AND CONFRONTING THE ABSOLUTE.
SO CLOSE TO THE SERENITY OF THE SPHERES...THAT HE SEEMS ALMOST **POSSESSED.**

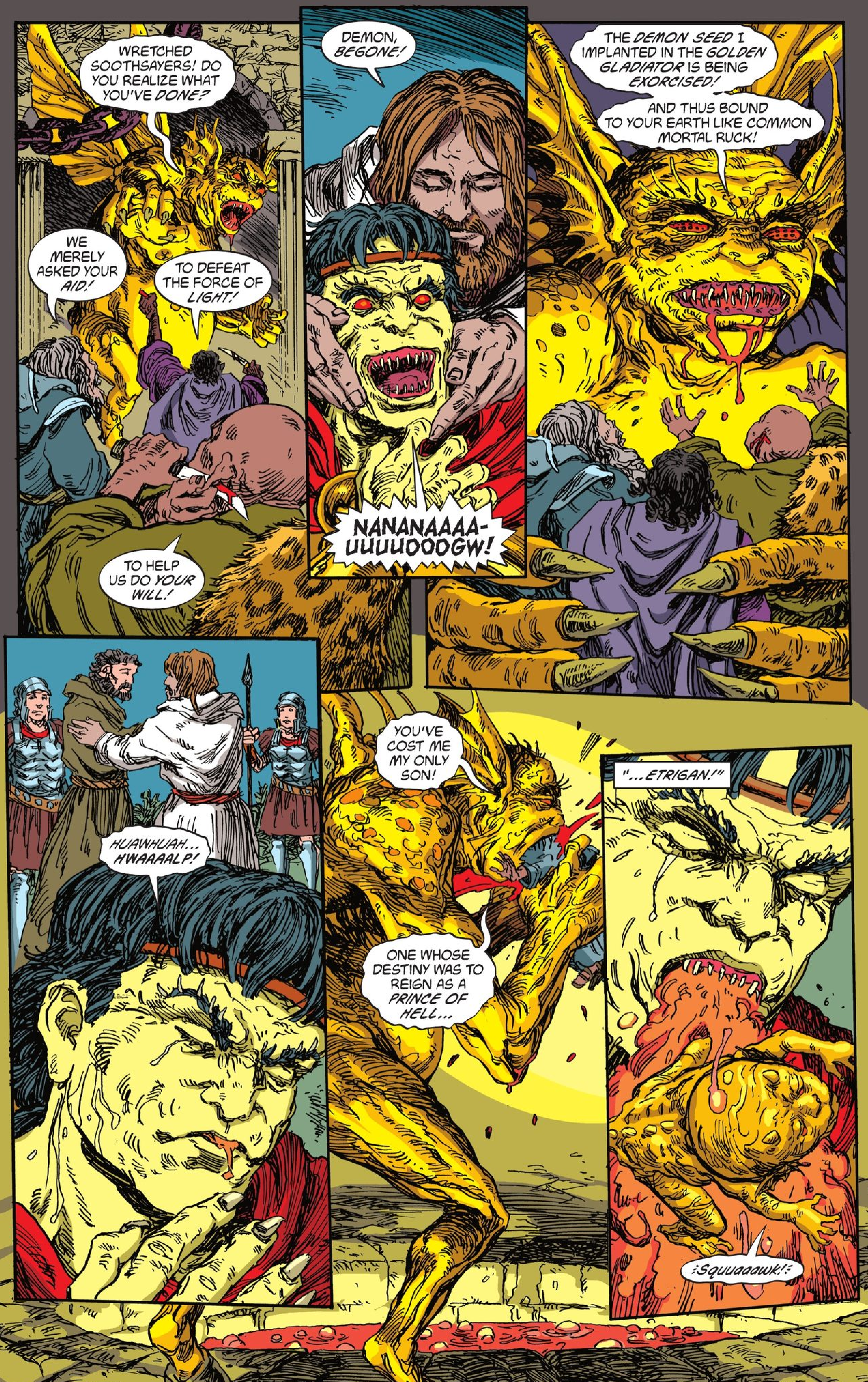

WE HAVE THE WRIT, NOW WHERE'S THE TWIT?
WE'VE GOT AN *INFORMER,* MARCUS. *JUDAS ISCARIOT* WILL LEAD US TO HIM!
A DEMON'S HEART IS WARMED INDEED TO FIND A VIPER IN THE MIDST.
METHINKS WE'LL KNOW OUR QUARRY WELL WHEN JUDAS PLANTS HIS TRAITOR'S KISS! *HAHAHAHA!*
HHHH--GOOD OLD MARCUS! HOW DOES HE THINK UP THESE MOCKING VERSES?
SHALL I GIVE THE ORDER TO MOVE OUT, THEN, CAPTAIN?
HOLD! OUR CAMP IS FOLLOWED BY A WOMAN DRESSED IN SCARLET...
DOES SHE THINK THAT PILATE'S ORDERS WAIT FOR ANY COMMON HARLOT?
MARCUS--PLEASE! THE WARRANT IS FOR THE NAZARENE I TOLD YOU ABOUT.
YOU SAID YOU'D MAKE SURE HE GOT *AWAY,* REMEMBER?
A PROMISE TO A WHORE IS NOT FOR HONOR SAVING...
AOW!
ONE KEEPS IT ONLY LONG ENOUGH TO SATISFY A CRAVING! *HAHAHAHAHAHA!*

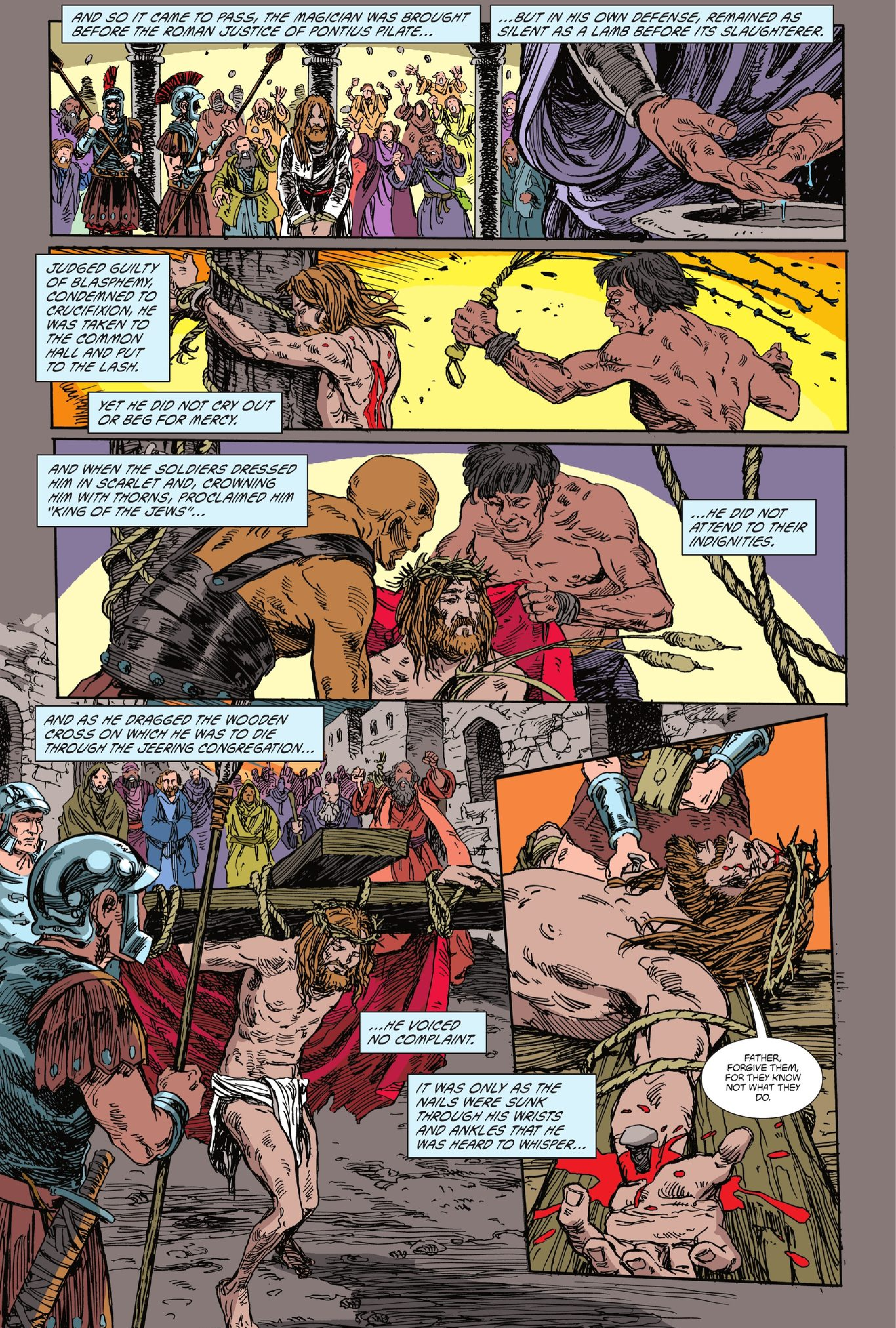

I HEAR THE BLUSTERING CRIES... OF DOMINEERING MEN-AT-ARMS IN LOCKSTEP.
THEY ARE COMING... FOR **HIM**.
THOSE CHARGED WITH PROTECTING HIM... DREAM THE SLEEP OF DENIAL...
...WHILE THEIR MASTER BEATS... A MIND TATTOO...UPON THE INVISIBLE QUANTUM OCEAN.
I HAVE BATTLED...ENOUGH EVIL MAGICIANS...TO KNOW THAT SORCERY REQUIRES **SACRIFICE**...TO GIVE IT PERMANENCE.
YET THIS ADEPT...CASTS HIS SPELL...NOT FOR PERSONAL GAIN...OR TEMPORAL POWER...BUT FROM THE VERY **HEART** OF COMPASSION.
I CAN CONCEIVE...OF NO VIOLENCE... THIS MAN WOULD EVER WORK...ON ANY OTHER LIVING BEING.
NO INNOCENT BLOOD... THIS MAN COULD SHED.

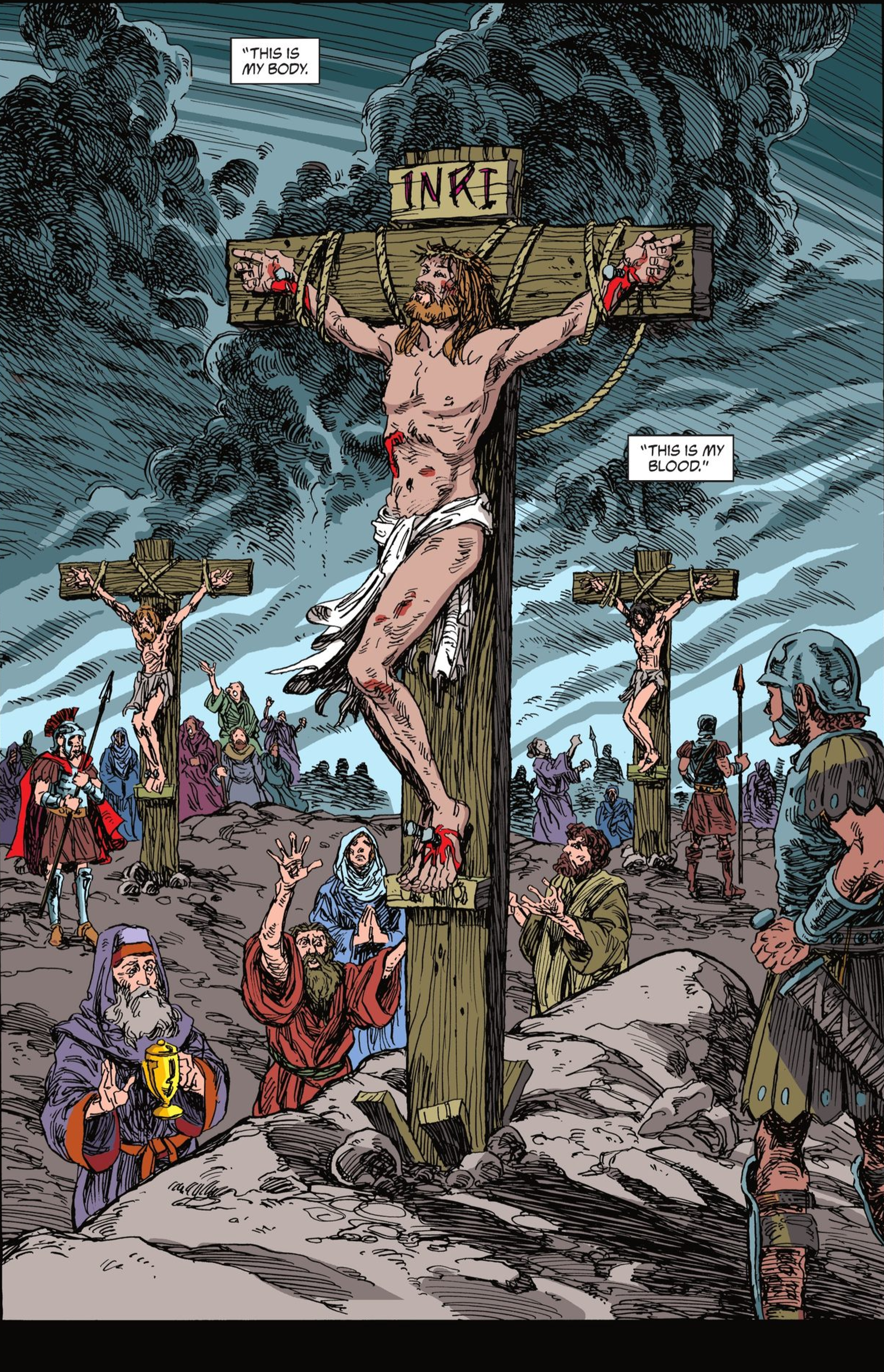

NO BLOOD THIS NIGHT WAS SPILT OR POURED, NOR HAVE I DRUNK APOSTLE'S GORE, WHEN ALL *THESE* GUARDS ARE FAMOUS FOR IS HOW THEY EACH ARE PRONE TO SNORE.
HAHAHAHA!
ALL THEY GET FOR THIS NIGHT'S PAINS ARE FRACTURES, BRUISES, BUMPS, AND SPRAINS...
...WHILE ROMAN JUSTICE, BLIND, PROCLAIMS...
...WE DRAG THEIR MASTER BACK IN *CHAINS! HAHAHAHAHA!*
FROM INITIAL APPEARANCE... THE GOLD-CLAD CENTURION... COULD BE MISTAKEN...FOR A **NORMAL** HUMAN.
UNTIL ONE NOTICES... THE GIBBERING, HUNCHED GAIT...
...AND THE COMPULSIVE METER...OF RHYMES DIPPED IN SARCASM...
ONLY THEN DO I RECOGNIZE... THE HIDEOUS GIGGLING...BORNE STRAIGHT OUT...OF THE DARKEST HOLE IN HELL.

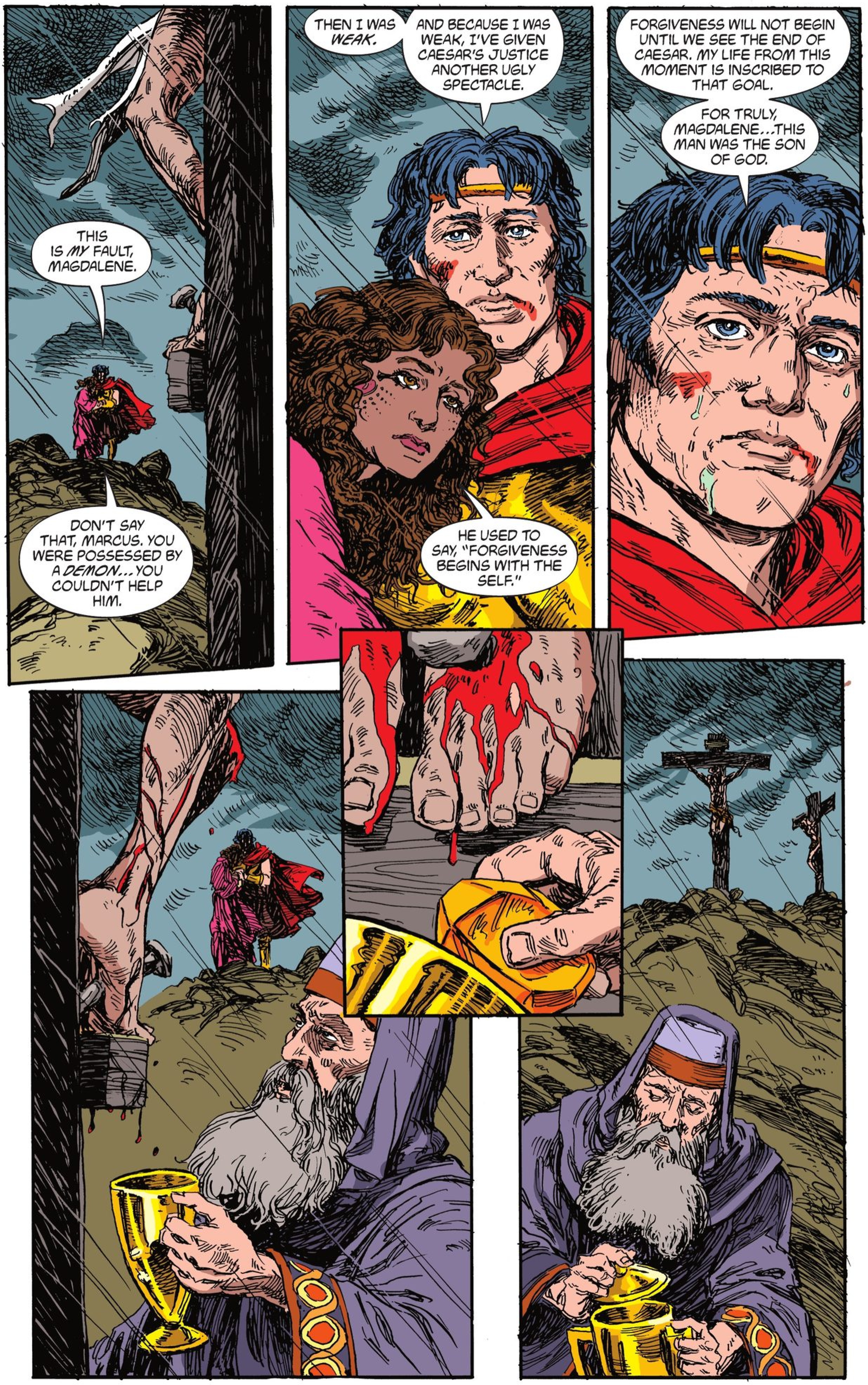

HAHAHAAAAAAAUUGHH!
OUR LORD HAS CALLED DOWN AN *ANGEL* TO AID US, BROTHERS! CUT THE ROMAN SCUM--!
SLLT
I CARE NOT... WHICH VESSEL RAISED YOU FROM WHATEVER PIT YOU WERE SPAWNED IN...
HSSSSS
...I'LL NEVER LET...YOUR DEMON TONGUE SUP...FROM THIS MAN'S GOOD WORKS!

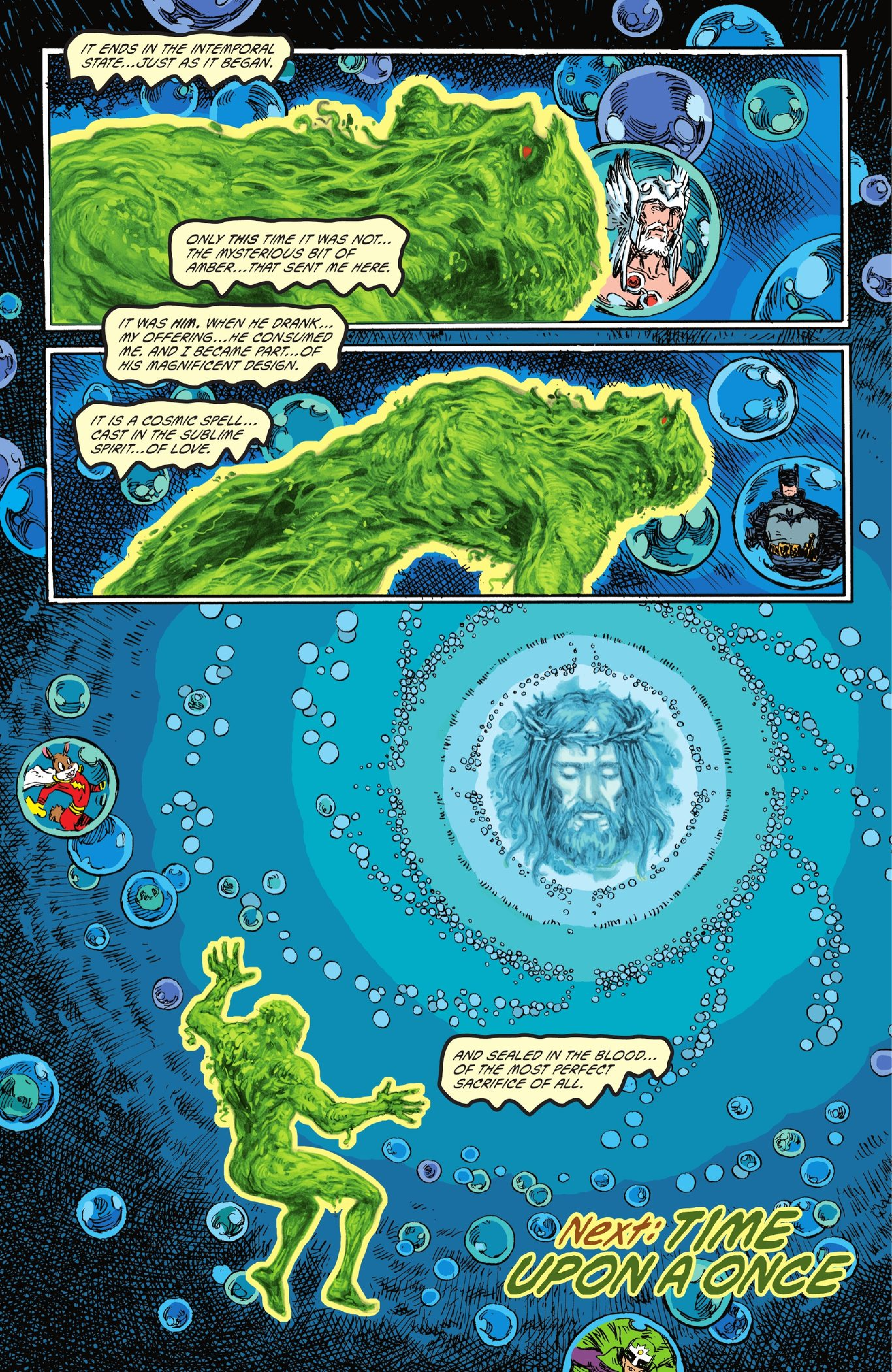

SUDDENLY...THE FOCAL POINT...OF MY VIOLENCE...BEGINS TO DIMINISH.
MY SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS DROPS AWAY...LIKE SO MUCH MOLDY SEAWEED.
AND MY ANGER DISSOLVES...INTO A QUIVERING PATTERN...OF SUPERNATURAL SPONTANEITY.
ECHOING THE DELICATE TOUCH...THAT A MASTER... HAS SCULPTED UPON THE LIMITLESS FLOW OF WORLDS.
ONE THAT PROCLAIMS...TO ALL THE HUMAN SOULS...IN THE GRIP OF THE DARK, HIDDEN FORCES...
...THAT THEY NOW...CAN BE TRANSFORMED...
...INTO MIRACLES.


WRETCHED SOOTHSAYERS! DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'VE *DONE?*
WE MERELY ASKED YOUR *AID!*
TO DEFEAT THE FORCE OF *LIGHT!*
TO HELP US DO *YOUR WILL!*
DEMON, *BEGONE!*
NANANAAAA-UUUUOOOGW!
THE *DEMON SEED* I IMPLANTED IN THE *GOLDEN GLADIATOR* IS BEING *EXORCISED!*
AND THUS BOUND TO YOUR EARTH LIKE COMMON MORTAL RUCK!
HUAWHUAH... HWAAAALP!
YOU'VE COST ME MY ONLY SON!
ONE WHOSE DESTINY WAS TO REIGN AS A *PRINCE OF HELL...*
"...ETRIGAN!"
Squuaaawk!


AND SO IT CAME TO PASS, THE MAGICIAN WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE ROMAN JUSTICE OF PONTIUS PILATE...
...BUT IN HIS OWN DEFENSE, REMAINED AS SILENT AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SLAUGHTERER.
JUDGED GUILTY OF BLASPHEMY, CONDEMNED TO CRUCIFIXION, HE WAS TAKEN TO THE COMMON HALL AND PUT TO THE LASH.
YET HE DID NOT CRY OUT OR BEG FOR MERCY.
AND WHEN THE SOLDIERS DRESSED HIM IN SCARLET AND, CROWNING HIM WITH THORNS, PROCLAIMED HIM "KING OF THE JEWS"...
...HE DID NOT ATTEND TO THEIR INDIGNITIES.
AND AS HE DRAGGED THE WOODEN CROSS ON WHICH HE WAS TO DIE THROUGH THE JEERING CONGREGATION...
...HE VOICED NO COMPLAINT.
IT WAS ONLY AS THE NAILS WERE SUNK THROUGH HIS WRISTS AND ANKLES THAT HE WAS HEARD TO WHISPER...
FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.


"THIS IS MY BODY.
INRI
"THIS IS MY BLOOD."


THIS IS *MY* FAULT, MAGDALENE.
DON'T SAY THAT, MARCUS. YOU WERE POSSESSED BY A *DEMON*... YOU COULDN'T HELP HIM.
THEN I WAS *WEAK.*
AND BECAUSE I WAS WEAK, I'VE GIVEN CAESAR'S JUSTICE ANOTHER UGLY SPECTACLE.
HE USED TO SAY, "FORGIVENESS BEGINS WITH THE SELF."
FORGIVENESS WILL NOT BEGIN UNTIL WE SEE THE END OF CAESAR. MY LIFE FROM THIS MOMENT IS INSCRIBED TO THAT GOAL.
FOR TRULY, MAGDALENE...THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD.


IT ENDS IN THE INTEMPORAL STATE...JUST AS IT BEGAN.
ONLY THIS TIME IT WAS NOT... THE MYSTERIOUS BIT OF AMBER...THAT SENT ME HERE.
IT WAS HIM. WHEN HE DRANK... MY OFFERING...HE CONSUMED ME. AND I BECAME PART...OF HIS MAGNIFICENT DESIGN.
IT IS A COSMIC SPELL... CAST IN THE SUBLIME SPIRIT...OF LOVE.
AND SEALED IN THE BLOOD... OF THE MOST PERFECT SACRIFICE OF ALL.
Next: TIME UPON A ONCE

SWAMP THINGS

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A New Dawn
(for "Morning of the Magician")

The cancellation of the planned-and-well-into-completion *Swamp Thing* #88, titled "Morning of the Magician," was likely triggered by the cover image delivered to DC by series writer (and regular penciller and cover artist) Rick Veitch.

It depicted Swamp Thing as a crucifix, with Jesus and the two thieves' crucifixion in the distance.

Then again, looking back at the events of 1989 from the 21st century, it might seem everyone was overreacting a bit, given what's tolerable and even celebrated in our current day and its pop culture.

Not to incite or offend anyone, but a joke I often heard growing up seems relevant:

How do you make God laugh?

Make a plan.

* * * * *

Without getting too lost in the particulars—this is, after all, a couple of text pages in a single comic book—suffice it to acknowledge that major social, political, and cultural changes throughout the 1980s informed what happened to (and didn't happen with) "Morning of the Magician." To cite only a few landmarks, consider the political rise of Ronald Reagan to the White House and subsequent years of transformative Reaganism (in all its myriad forms), televangelism, and the influence of the so-called religious right. All this led to President Reagan signing into law a bill on May 5, 1988, (unanimously passed in Congress) that designated the first Thursday in May as the National Day of Prayer.

Rick points out how, one year later, "the cultural climate of 1989 (Salman Rushdie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, corporate mergers, DC's Standards and Practices)…fed the *Swamp Thing* #88 debacle," all of which is true. The international upset over the August 1988 release of Martin Scorsese, Paul Schrader, and Jay Cocks's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, from the Nikos Kazantzakis novel (1955), followed the release of *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979) by almost a decade, generating far-more-virulent religious outrage. That was followed by the September 1988 publication of the award-winning *The Satanic Verses* by India-born British American novelist Salman Rushdie; both erupted in accusations of blasphemy. Scorsese's film sparked protests, death threats, and the detonation of an incendiary bomb in a Parisian cinema. Rushdie's novel fomented Islamic extremist bombings, killings, and riots, multiple book bans, and a fatwa against Rushdie (who survived multiple failed assassination attempts).

At the same time, in less lofty (but no less potentially profitable) media arenas, the comic book industry was experiencing remarkable growing pains as the maturation of the direct-sales marketplace and what was possible aesthetically in the comics medium yielded previously unimaginable dividends—and divisions. It was a double-edged sword, to be sure: As readers responded to greater expressive freedoms and more-mature content, creators, publishers, distributors, and retailers took greater risks, hoping to reap the benefits (in mercantile terms), all the while courting disaster.

The explosion of new ways to do and sell comics in the 1980s ushered in many innovations—in content, in creativity, in formats (i.e., graphic novels)—and was matched by a seemingly inevitable conservative backlash (i.e., comics-shop busts, legal challenges, calls for new regulations and/or censorship). Despite its modest sales status compared to seminal works such as *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, *Maus*, and others, DC's *Swamp Thing* was perceived by some as a leading edge of reformation and change; I'd argue, in fact, it was our initial below-the-radar stature that afforded our creative team (in which Rick was a vital partner from the very beginning of *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*'s run) the freedoms we initially made the most of. Like any corporate media entity, DC was eager to stimulate and profit from these changes in the medium and marketplace, but they were also wary of unintended consequences. Courting controversy often successfully attracted readers and escalated sales (as with Jim Starlin and Jim Aparo's 1988 *Batman* narrative arc "A Death in the Family"), but that could inadvertently backfire, too.

DC's ongoing attempts to realign to the changing times yielded both positive and negative results. The former included DC's more-progressive contractual policies for a generation of creators; the latter included a planned company self-regulation and labeling of product—tagged "Universal," "Mature Readers," and/or "Adult"—sans alerting, or any consultation with, the company's most prominent creators (such as Frank Miller, Alan Moore, Marv Wolfman, and Howard Chaykin). A collective resistance by these and other creators (myself included) was quickly mobilized, preemptively petitioning DC and publicly protesting, arguing that any such systematic rating template invited creative compromise and self-censorship. DC abandoned their proposal, but the damage had been done.

In the wake of that controversy, behind the scenes

Rick was told not to worry—that as long as he worked closely with DC editorial, the company wanted him to continue to work on *Swamp Thing* (and other planned projects) with relative freedom.

* * * * *

Unfortunately, much larger corporate and cultural forces were in motion, all of which would have a negative impact on "Morning of the Magician."

Journalists and mass media were paying close attention to the corporate maneuvers culminating in Time Inc.'s March 4, 1989, announcement of the merger of DC Comics' parent company, Warner Bros., with Time to spawn what was at that time the world's largest media entity. Despite numerous attempts to block the Time-Warner merger, courts ruled in Time's favor. The Time-Warner merger was launched January 10, 1990.

During this period, the Warner Bros. motion picture studio had lavished considerable resources (a reported $35-48 million budget, an epic two-hour, six-minute running time) on Tim Burton and Sam Hamm's feature film *Batman*—bringing more-intensive corporate scrutiny of DC's operations. Profitable as "A Death in the Family" had been for DC a year earlier, Warner now discouraged any such radical upheaval (in that case the brutal death of the second Robin, Jason Todd) in the Batman universe until after the June 23, 1989, opening of Burton's *Batman*. This also meant day-to-day editorial operations and decisions were enduring closer corporate scrutiny, including those of *Swamp Thing*'s team.

Having studiously adhered to the principles he had accepted to continue writing and pencilling *Swamp Thing*, Rick set to work on the planned concluding chapters of his time-traveling narrative arc. Rick did everything by the book: pitched his story plans, submitted his outline and then the script for #88, which was approved and scheduled with its usual team in place (colored by Tatjana Wood, lettered by John Costanza, edited by Karen Berger and Art Young) working with Rick, penciller Michael Zulli (then of *The Puma Blues* and soon-to-be-famed issues of *The Sandman*), and inker Tom Sutton (a beloved veteran comics artist since the mid-1960s, having done extensive genre work for Warren's black-and-white horror comics, Charlton, DC, and Marvel's *Planet of the Apes*).

Then—KABLOOEY! Despite DC's initial approval of Rick's plot, his script, and Michael Zulli's pencils, and Tom Sutton having already begun the inks, the plug was pulled at the eleventh hour, and *Swamp Thing* #88's "Morning of the Magician" never saw the light of day. Whatever the reason—be it the cultural moment, worry over backlash, the proposed cover, or most likely a combination of the above—bodily bringing the time-traveling Swamp Thing directly into New Testament territory was now considered a step too far for Rick's ongoing saga.

Full disclosure: In Rick's own recollection of events, I had a minor role in this crime cabal, having made a suggestion to Rick about making his adoption and adaptation of Paul-Gustave Doré's classic image of that ol' rugged cross just a *wee* bit more emotionally potent: "I showed you the pencils of the cross with Swampy looking straight ahead and stoic. You suggested I tilt his head back in suffering mode…I always maintained it was your suggestion that put it over the top." As they say, my bad!

* * * * *

The *Swamp Thing* #88 affair became a news item covered on MTV, in *The Wall Street Journal* (Monday, June 26, 1989, "A Slimy Monster Hobnobs in Heaven but Not Holy Land: 'Swamp Thing' of the Comics, Who Even Met Hitler, Is Kept from Holy Grail" by Cynthia Crossen) and *Time* magazine (July 10, 1989, Vol. 134 No. 2, in the business section, "Comic Books: Swamp Thing's Quagmire"). As previously noted, journalists and the news media were paying very close attention to the proposed merger of Time Inc. and Warner—one wonders if the affairs of the time led to *Time* choosing to spotlight the controversy. What would have normally remained relegated to the pages of comics-industry publications like the weekly *Comic Buyer's Guide* and *The Comics Journal* (both covered the story extensively during its short duration) was suddenly considered worthy of *mainstream* national news. The spillover from the one-two punch of DC's proposed rating system and particularly the Time-Warner merger invited such media attention, fanning what would have been in earlier industry times a behind-the-scenes upheaval precious few would have heard about, much less saw covered on MTV and cable news and in *Time* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Despite that media attention, there was much that remained unreported.

There were plans afoot about where to take *Swamp Thing* as a series in the wake of the *planned* completion of Rick's time-travel narrative epic, but those plans were derailed completely by the events that consigned "Morning of the Magician" to the dustbin of history (until now), which at the time prompted Rick's *unplanned* early exit. Fellow DC writers Jamie Delano and Neil Gaiman were actively engaged in conversations with Rick and editor Karen Berger about how the three of them might orchestrate Rick's departure and initiate Jamie and Neil ushering in a new dynasty (so to speak).

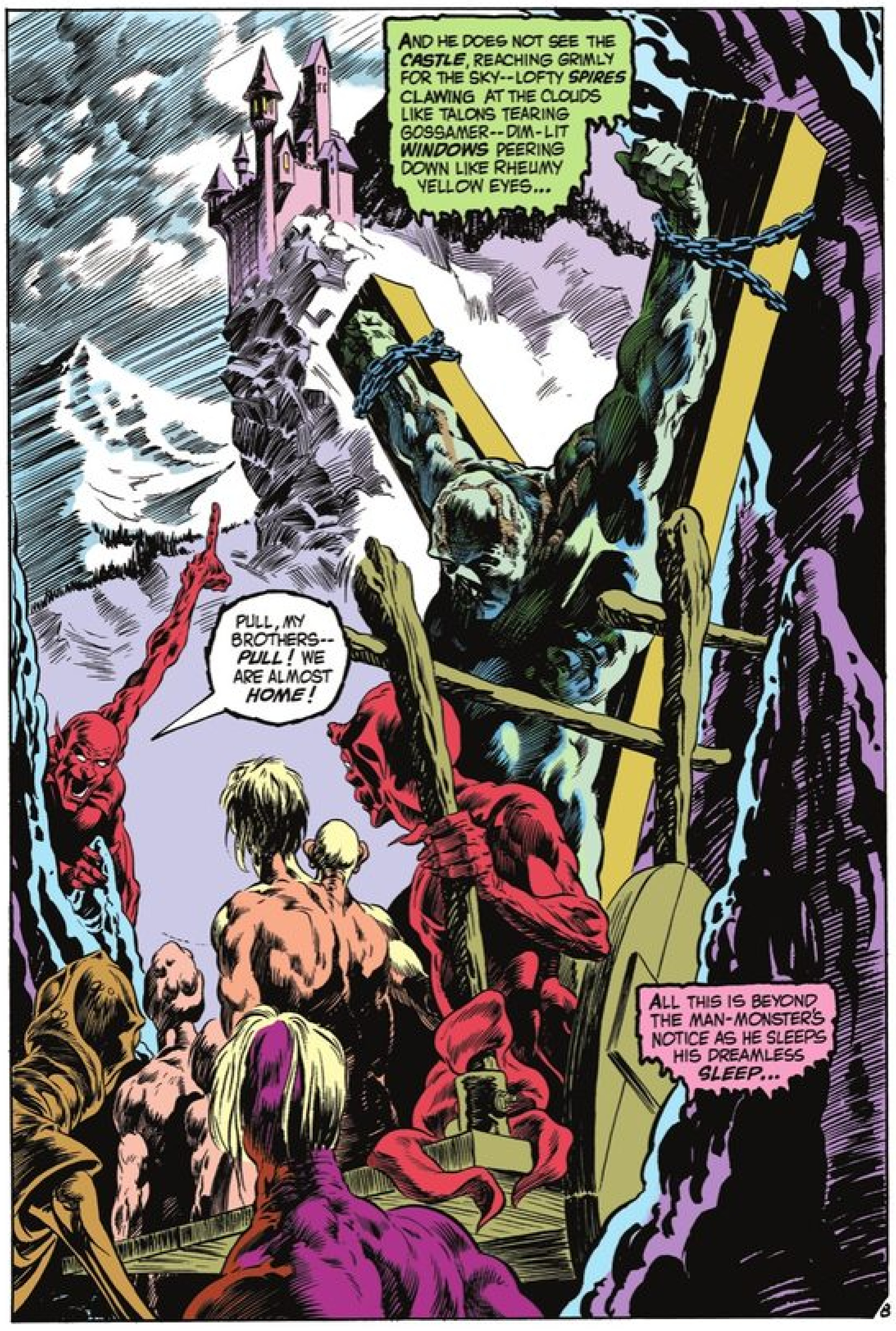
Those plans, of course, were scuttled as soon as "Morning of the Magician" was so abruptly aborted, and Rick made his decision to redirect his creative energies elsewhere—as did Jamie and Neil, though I hasten to note both of them were fully occupied with their respective ongoing DC comics, *Hellblazer* and *The Sandman*.

Before that, however, Rick attempted to mend fences. "In conversations with DC, I did offer to make any changes they requested," Rick remembers. "I also suggested possible scenarios of co-publishing the issue with another publisher. Neither got any traction." Given the circumstances, Rick saw no choice but to step away from *Swamp Thing*, joined by Jamie and Neil.

Mind you, there are other crucial elements to the entire story; it's been extraordinarily difficult to strip such a tangled and still-controversial history down to a digestible essay of this length. Limited space in this venue doesn't permit my getting into the reactions of fans and readers and retailers (I'll get into that, and much, much more, in the longer essay I've contributed to a forthcoming collected edition, and it will be worth the wait, I assure you).

* * * * *

I'd argue the connections Rick made were implicit, even explicit, in the four-color-comic-book genetic structure of the character, in Swamp Thing's origins. It wasn't a reach for Rick to incorporate the very being of Swamp Thing into the wood grain of the Christian-revered Calvary crucifix—it was hardwired into the character and series by co-creators Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson from the second issue of *Swamp Thing* (#2, cover-dated December 1972–January 1973).


AND HE DOES NOT SEE THE CASTLE, REACHING GRIMLY FOR THE SKY--LOFTY SPIRES CLAWING AT THE CLOUDS LIKE TALONS TEARING GOSSAMER--DIM-LIT WINDOWS PEERING DOWN LIKE RHEUMY YELLOW EYES...
PULL, MY BROTHERS-- PULL! WE ARE ALMOST HOME!
ALL THIS IS BEYOND THE MAN-MONSTER'S NOTICE AS HE SLEEPS HIS DREAMLESS SLEEP...
8

That the imagery had also emerged organically from the opportunity to delineate "wall-to-wall monsters" (in Bernie's own words, interviewed in *Back Issue* #6, September 2004) issue after issue is also foundational.

Having introduced the Un-Men on page 3 of *Swamp Thing* #2's "The Man Who Wanted Forever"—"countless un-human shapes that drop from the towering treetops like a demonic rain… covering the massive man-monster with a blanket of synthetic flesh…"—Len and Bernie had the serpentine Ophidian mesmerize Swamp Thing. Arcane's grotesque army chained Swampy to an X-configuration cross and fly him via plane(!) to "an icy Balkan lake" to float and pole our still-unconscious muck-man protagonist across the waters to an "angry mountain's maw," entryway to Arcane's lair. The crucified Swamp Thing is then carried by cart up to the cliff-side castle, revealed in a justifiably celebrated full-page splash (story page 8) foregrounding the Un-Men and their chained victim—Wrightson and Wein's adoption of unforgettable imagery from James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

It's no secret that Bernie loved Boris Karloff's Monster from the 1930s Universal Frankenstein movies, and there's no mistaking the homage Wrightson was paying to *The Bride of Frankenstein*'s set piece, described in the first-ever serious English-language critical study of the genre as an "irreverent" tableau: "The Monster, trussed up and raised aloft on a cross by villagers, becomes a queer Christlike figure" (Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*, 1967, first edition, G.P. Putnam's Sons, pg. 69).

Rick Veitch, raised as a lad in a New England Catholic school, was simply making explicit what had so long been implicit in Len and Bernie's original *Swamp Thing*. The series had since gone to both Hell and Heaven. Meeting Jesus was a logical progression.

* * * * *

So, how about now—how might this 2026 publication stack up in our current sociopolitical landscape? I'm wary of even speculating, given how alarming and often seismic every 24-hour news cycle has become.

All that matters, really, is what do *you* think?

You don't need me to elucidate anything about the incredible work you now hold in your hands, save to note that longtime beloved friends Michael Zulli and Tom Sutton are no longer with us. Michael, a.k.a. Mr. Zed, however, lived long enough to work anew on this once-unimaginable-in-print masterwork, and Vince Locke has taken Tom Sutton's place with grace, style, and devotion appropriate to the story and imagery at hand. Gone too is colorist Tatjana Wood, who left us just recently (née Weintraub, March 2, 1926–February 27, 2026) only days shy of what would have been her 100th birthday. Eisner Award winner Trish Mulvihill (she won in 2004, for her stellar work on DC's *Batman* and *Wonder Woman* and Vertigo/DC's *100 Bullets*) has taken on the coloring duties for this completion of the previously incomplete #88 and Rick's subsequent issues, doing a bit of time-traveling (since she entered the industry in her late twenties just a few years after the *Swamp Thing* #88 controversy and upheaval) and honoring Tatjana with her work. Same for Todd Klein, honoring the great John Costanza with his lettering.

I could go on and on—about Rick, about Michael (we worked together on multiple projects over the years, and were very close for a time), about Tom Sutton (who used to call me at odd hours in the pitch-dark of night and predawn mornings, and we'd talk for hours on the phone) and about Tatjana—and about *Swamp Thing* #88, what it was, what it is, what it has become at long last.

Times change.

You're about to time-travel, like Swamp Thing, back to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Read on, brave time traveler. Read on.

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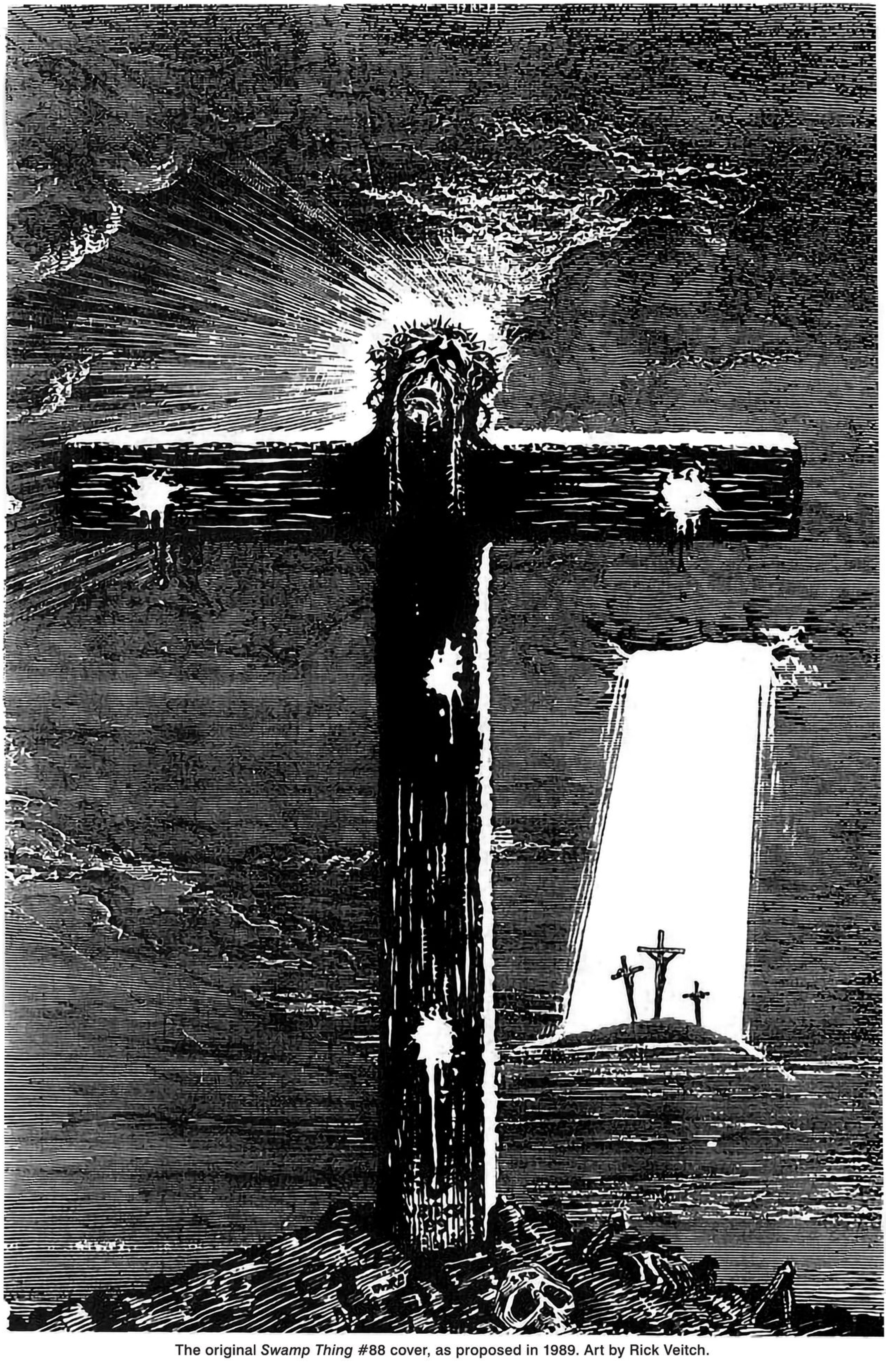
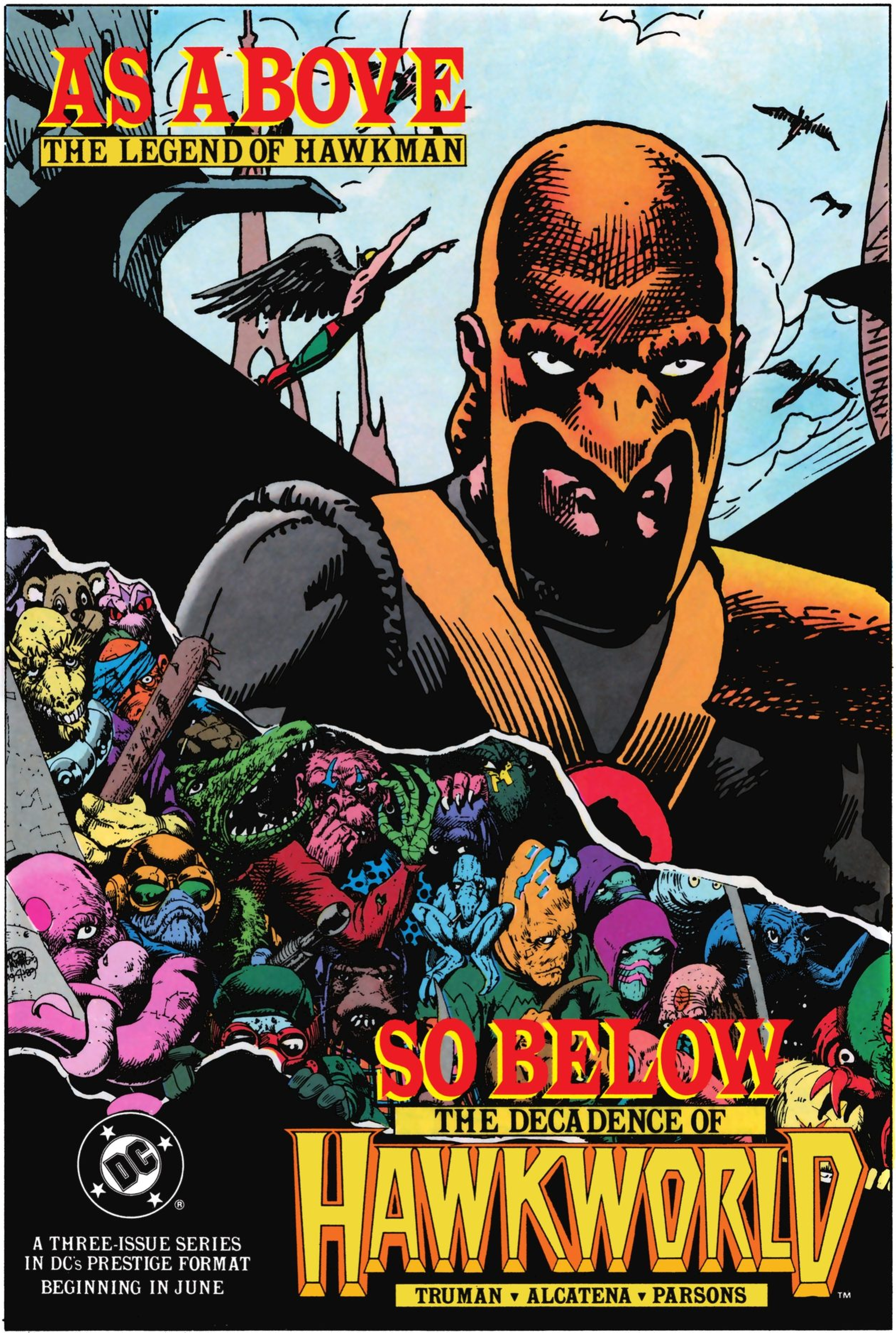
Spring 2026
Mountains of Madness, VT



The original *Swamp Thing* #88 cover, as proposed in 1989. Art by Rick Veitch.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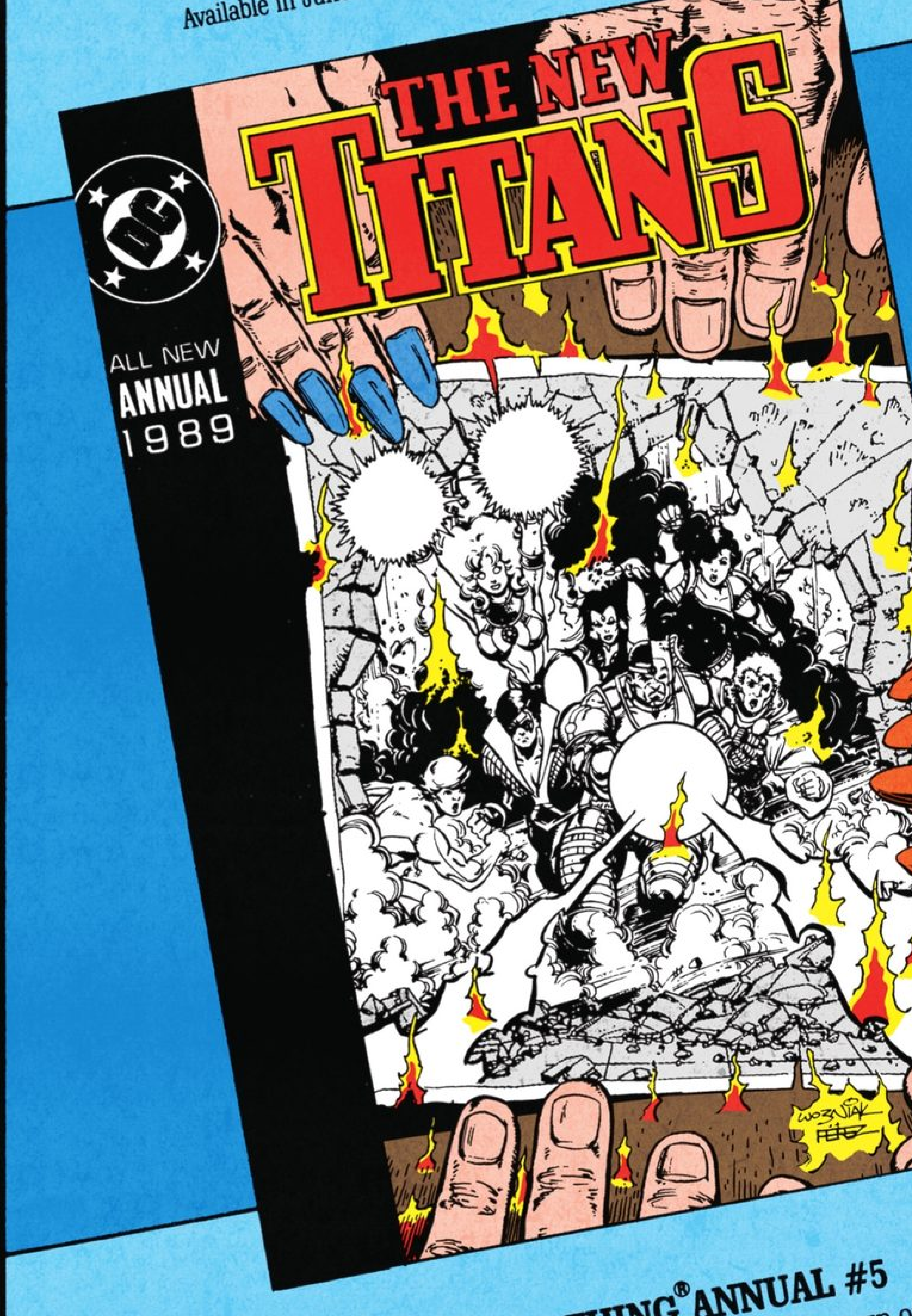

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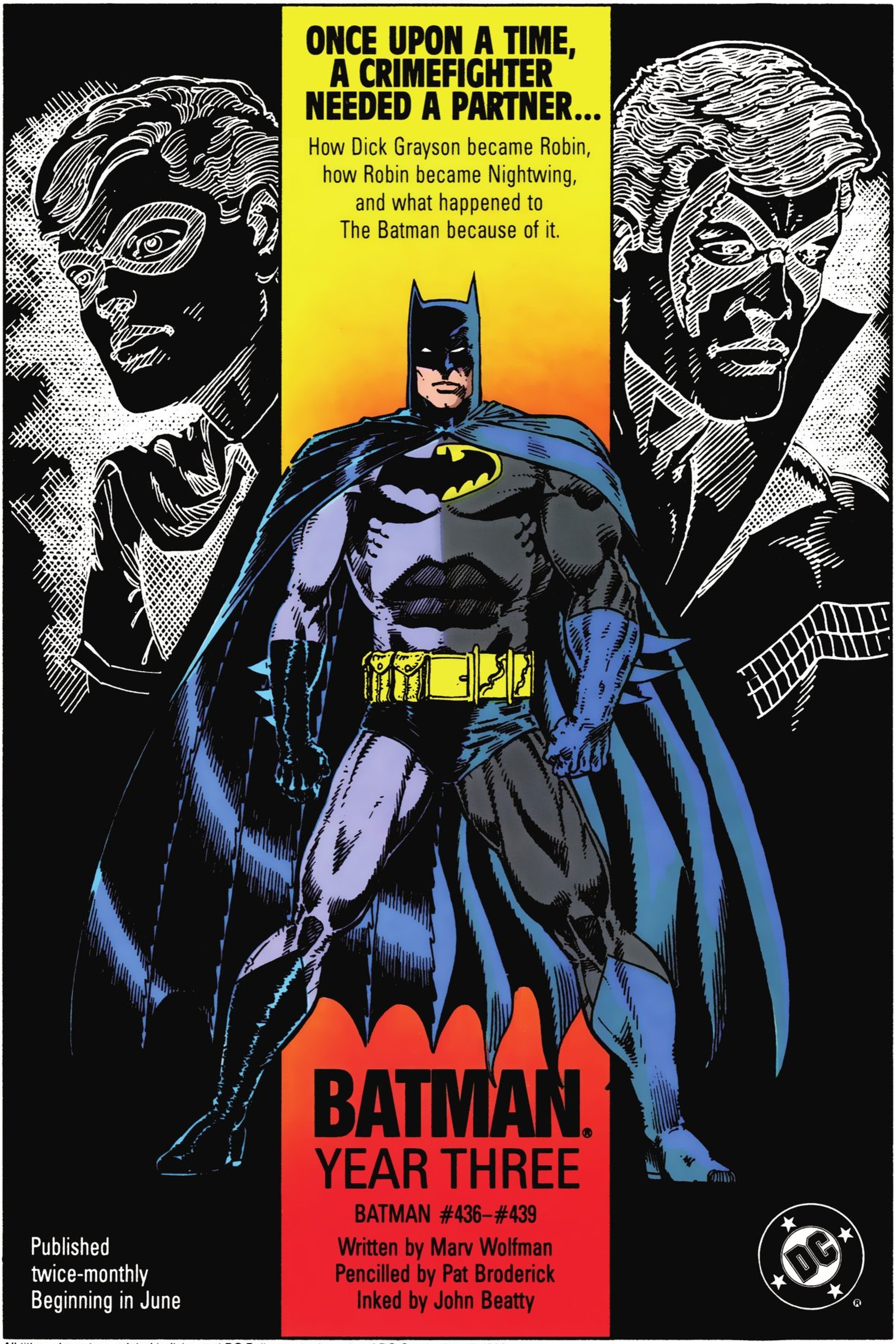

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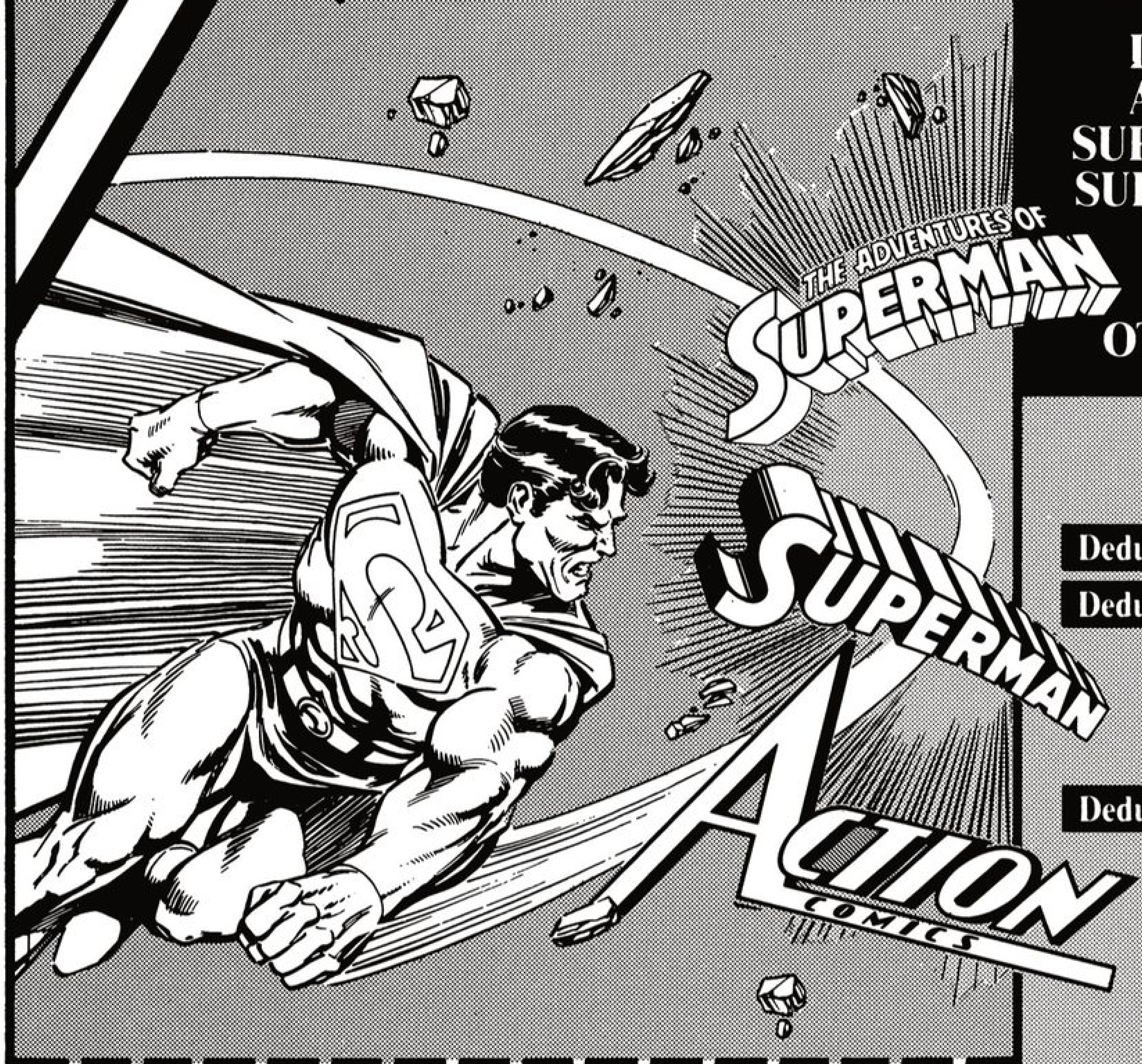

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